NATION

States on edge as Telangana sees 1st case of GBS

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BUSINESS

Mkts rally after Eco Survey release; L&T major driver

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SPORTS

13 years for 15 balls: Kohli scene turns sour

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SALAR
DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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K'taka enacts SC's 'right to die with dignity' directive

BENGALURU, 31 JAN

Karnataka's Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao has announced a significant move to uphold the Supreme Court's directive regarding patients' right to die with dignity. In a statement on social media platform 'X', he revealed that the state health department has issued a historic order facilitating this initiative.

The order includes the introduction of an Advance Medical Directive (AMD), commonly referred to as a living will. This directive allows patients to stipulate their preferences concerning medical treatments should they find themselves in a situation where they are terminally ill or in a persistent vegetative state, and where life-sustaining treatments no longer serve a beneficial purpose.

- This directive allows patients to stipulate their preferences concerning medical treatments should they find themselves in a situation where they are terminally ill or in a persistent vegetative state, and where life-sustaining treatments no longer serve a beneficial purpose.

Minister Rao emphasised that this measure will provide immense relief and a dignified closure for numerous families and individuals facing such challenging circumstances. "Karnataka is a progressive state and we are always at the forefront in upholding liberal and equitable values for a more just society," he stated, highlighting the state's commitment to compassionate healthcare. This landmark decision signifies a pivotal step forward in the realm of patient rights, reflecting a growing recognition of the importance of personal autonomy in medical care. *—PTI*

In wake-up call, Economic Survey forecasts 6.3% GDP

It calls for 8% growth for India to be developed by 2047

NEW DELHI, 31 JAN

India's economy is likely to expand by 6.3-6.8 per cent in the coming fiscal, much lower than what is needed to become a developed country, according to the government's pre-Budget Economic Survey. It also added that India requires deregulation and reforms in areas such as land and labour to stimulate growth.

It also added that the Forex stands at $640.3 billion and will cover 10.9 months of imports and 90per cent of external debt.

The state of the economy document, tabled in Parliament by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Friday, indicated that India's growth is moderating and more needs to be done to achieve 8 per cent annual rate needed for the nation to be developed by 2024.

PHOTO: PIXABAY

The 6.3 per cent to 6.8 per cent growth rate in 2025-26 compares to an estimated 6.4 per cent growth in the current year ending 31 March - the weakest since the pandemic - and 8.2 per cent in the past 2023-24 financial year.

Geopolitical and trade uncertainties, along with possible commodity price shocks, pose headwinds to the economy, said Chief Economic Adviser V Anantha Nageswaran, who along with his team in the finance ministry, authored the report.

The survey said India needs to grow at 8 per cent over the next decade, and the investment rate must rise to 35 per cent of GDP from the current 31 per cent for India to be a developed nation by 2047.

The report called for states to reduce the cost of compliance by liberalising standards and controls on businesses as well as cutting tariffs and feeds.

It predicted that food inflation will soften in the January to March quarter.

Retail inflation, it said, will "progressively" align with Reserve Bank of India's 4 per cent rate.

This could, however, be derailed by any bad weather events and a rise in international commodity prices.

India's retail inflation eased to a four-month low of 5.2 per cent in December 2024 but food inflation continued to remain high at 8.39 per cent, with vegetable prices rising at 26.56 per cent. The survey said the global growth is expected to be slightly below trend, with the services sector performing well while manufacturing struggles. Inflationary pressures are easing globally, but geopolitical risks remain a concern. *—PTI*

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Sonia calls Murmu 'poor thing', faces flak

BJP seized upon comments made by former Congress president Sonia Gandhi regarding President Droupadi Murmu's parliamentary address, claiming her reference to the President as a "poor thing" . Following Murmu's address to Parliament, she was heard discussing with Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi, stating, "The poor lady, was getting very tired by the end...she could hardly speak, poor thing." *—PTI*

BACKED BY WORLD BANK

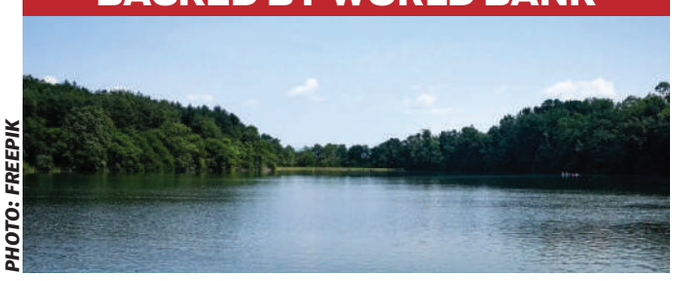

PHOTO: FREEPIK

K'taka Cabinet approves ₹5,000 cr for water security

BENGALURU, 31 JAN

The Karnataka Cabinet has given green signal to the Karnataka Water Security and Disaster Resilience Programme (KWSRDP), backed by World Bank funding, at an estimated cost of Rs 5,000 crore. The World Bank is set to provide a loan of Rs 3,500 crore for the initiative.

The project will move forward pending approval from the Department of Economic Affairs, Government of India, alongside the signing of the loan agreement with the World Bank. In the cabinet meeting held on Thursday, it was decided to empower the Department of Revenue (Disaster Management) with the execution of the KWSRDP. Additionally, the Department of Finance has been instructed to negotiate with the World Bank regarding the loan terms and currency, subject to prior approval from the Department of Economic Affairs.

Moreover, the cabinet approved the Public Private Partnership Policy-2025.

In a separate development, the cabinet has opted to withdraw the Karnataka Urban and Rural Planning (Amendment) Bill, 2024, which related to the premium floor area ratio (FAR). This decision follows the return of the Bill by Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot, who had requested clarifications. The cabinet emphasised the need for consultation with relevant stakeholders to conduct a comprehensive review of the legal concerns raised. *—PTI*

12 industrial nodes to get ₹28K cr: President

NEW DELHI, 31 JAN

In her address marking the beginning of the Budget session, President Droupadi Murmu announced that the government will invest approximately Rs 28,000 crore in the establishment of 12 industrial nodes and the development of 100 industrial parks across the nation.

The initiative is part of the National Industrial Corridor Development Programme, which received Cabinet approval last August. The industrial nodes will be strategically located in areas including Khurpia (Uttarakhand), Rajpura-Patiala (Punjab), Dighi (Maharashtra), Palakkad (Kerala), Agra, Prayagraj (Uttar Pradesh), Gaya (Bihar), Zaheerabad (Telangana), Orvakal and Kopparthy (Andhra Pradesh), and Jodhpur-Pali (Rajasthan).

Designed as greenfield smart cities, these new industrial centres will adhere to global standards and be developed based on the "plug-n-play" and "walk-to-work" concepts, ensuring the required infrastructure supports sustainable industrial activities.

President Murmu also emphasised the government's commitment to fostering entrepreneurship, particularly among small businesses, through initiatives such as the Credit Guarantee Scheme for MSMEs and the creation of e-commerce export hubs. Furthermore, she highlighted extensive reforms aimed at simplifying over 40,000 regulations and decriminalising 3,500 provisions to better align with contemporary socio-economic challenges. *—PTI*

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7 AAP MLAs resign ahead of Delhi polls

NEW DELHI, 31 JAN

In a setback to AAP, seven of its outgoing MLAs resigned from the party on Friday, with only five days to go for the Delhi Assembly polls.

Sources said these MLAs were disgruntled after being denied tickets for the 5 February polls and were in touch with other parties.

Most of the MLAs shared their resignation letters on social media and slammed AAP over corruption.

Madan Lal, the outgoing MLA from Kasturba Nagar, claimed that he and six other AAP legislators have quit the party's primary membership. Besides Lal, the AAP MLAs who have resigned are Bhavna Gaur (Palam), Naresh Yadav (Mehrauli), Rohit Mehraulia (Trilokpuri), Pawan Sharma (Adarsh Nagar), B S Joon (Bijwasan) and Rajesh Rishi (Janakpuri). Slamming these MLAs, AAP's national spokesperson Reena Gupta said a survey conducted by the party had revealed that all of them were unavailable to the public in their respective constituencies and that is why they were denied poll tickets. *—PTI*

SC bins plea against VIPs in temples

NEW DELHI, PRAYAGRAJ 31 JAN

The Supreme Court refused to entertain a PIL against the practice of charging an additional fee for "VIP darshan" which resulted in "preferential, selective and special treatment" to a certain class of people in temples. This comes days after a stampede in Maha Kumbh killed 30 people.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna said it was for the society and temple management to decide the issue and the court cannot pass any direction. "While we may think that no special treatment should be given, we cannot issue directions," it said.

Kumbh stampede committee reaches Prayagraj

Meanwhile, a three-member judicial commission set up by the Uttar Pradesh government to probe the Maha Kumbh stampede reached Prayagraj on Friday. *—PTI*

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GANGA AARTI IN VARANASI STOPPED TILL 5 FEB

After the Maha Kumbh stampede in which 30 people died, authorities have stopped the Ganga Aarti performed at the ghats of Varanasi for the general public till 5 February, owing to a surge in crowd.

Oppn chants 'shame, shame' amid VP's speech

NEW DELHI, 31 JAN

Opposition members chanted "shame, shame" as Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar mentioned the Maha Kumbh stampede while reading out President Droupadi Murmu's address in English during a joint sitting of Parliament. In her address, Murmu expressed grief over the loss of lives and wished a speedy recovery to the injured. While reading out the President's speech in English, Dhankhar reiterated what she said about the Maha Kumbh stampede, prompting cries of "shame, shame" from some opposition members. Earlier, when Murmu talked about North eastern states in her speech, few opposition members were heard saying, "Manipur, Manipur." *—PTI*

11 die in van-track collision in Punjab

FEROZEPUR, 31 JAN

Eleven people were killed and fifteen injured in a collision between a pick-up van and a canter truck in Punjab at around 8.00am, police said. The van was carrying more than 20 people -- mainly waiters -- who were going to attend a wedding ceremony. At least fifteen people suffered injuries and are undergoing treatment at various hospitals. Police said that while some reports had claimed that the accident was caused by low visibility due to fog, they are still investigating. Deputy Commissioner said Deepshikha Sharma said the administration will bear the treatment cost of the injured. Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann expressed grief over the incident. *—PTI*

Two Indians among victims of US air crash

WASHINGTON, 31 JAN

At least two Indian-origin persons are among the 67 people killed in a midair collision between an US Army helicopter and a jetliner at Washington's Ronald Reagan National Airport, according to media reports. Vikesh Patel, a GE Aerospace engineer and Asra Hussain Raza, a Washington DC-based consultant were on the doomed American Airlines flight 5342. In a statement to FOX19, Larry Culp, chairman and CEO of GE Aerospace identified Patel on Thursday night. "Our hearts are with his family and all those impacted by this horrific accident," Culp said. *—PTI*

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Incident not in public: SC junks case under SC/ST Act

NEW DELHI, 31 JAN

The Supreme Court on Friday quashed a case against a man booked under the SC/ST Act saying the alleged incident did not happen in public view. A bench of Justices B R Gavai and Augustine George Masih said Section 3(1)(r) of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, state that for an offence to occur, it had to be established that the accused intentionally insulted or intimidated a member of either a SC or ST with the intent to humiliate in a place within public view. The prosecution alleged that in 2021 the man approached the complainant, a revenue officer, to enquire over the status of a petition and hurled caste slurs during a quarrel in the office. *—PTI*

WARNS ECONOMIC SURVEY

'60-hr work week will have health risks'

PHOTO: FREEPIK

NEW DELHI, 31 JAN

The pre-Budget Economic Survey has ignited a debate on the implications of 70-90 hour work weeks, citing studies that suggest working beyond 60 hours per week can significantly harm health. The survey highlights that spending excessive time at a desk can detrimentally affect mental well-being, with individuals clocking in 12 or more hours daily reporting significantly lower mental health scores compared to those who work fewer hours.

Research referenced, including a study by Pega F and Nafradi B (2021) and findings from the WHO/ILO, indicates adverse health consequences arise when work hours exceed 55-60 weekly. The survey identified that fostering better lifestyle choices and improving workplace cultures could reduce absenteeism by 2-3 days per month. Bad relationships with management and feelings of low pride at work were found to exacerbate the number of days lost to mental health issues. The survey also noted that globally, depression and anxiety lead to approximately 12 billion lost workdays each year, costing about USD 1 trillion, or roughly Rs 7,000 per day in India. This debate comes in the wake of controversial comments from business leaders advocating longer work hours, which drew criticism from peers who emphasised the importance of work quality rather than sheer volume.

The survey underscores the necessity of addressing mental health issues in the workforce to sustain economic growth in India. *—PTI*

Tribal woman assaulted, disrobed, paraded in Gujarat

DAHOD, 31 JAN

A 35-year-old tribal woman in Gujarat's Dahod district was assaulted, stripped, and paraded by a mob led by her father-in-law over allegations of an extramarital affair. This shocking incident occurred on 28 January in a village within the Sanjeli taluka, prompting immediate police action after footage of the ordeal surfaced online.

Superintendent of Police Rajdeepsinh Zala confirmed that an FIR was filed on 29 January against 15 individuals, with 12 arrests made, including four men, four women, and four juveniles. The woman, who had reportedly gone to meet another man on the day of the incident, was attacked by a group that included family members. The mob assaulted her, partially disrobed her, and forced her to walk through the village with her hands bound by a chain.

The accused have been charged with abduction, wrongful confinement, affronting modesty, and assault with intent to disrobe. Additionally, those who filmed and shared the incident face repercussions under the Information Technology Act. *—PTI*

WHAT INDIA WANTS

A LOOK AT KEY EXPECTATIONS FROM BUDGET

As the Finance Minister presents the Union Budget today, **Salar News** looks at what the key sectors want. This year's Budget aims to control inflation, spending, and ensure economic stability. Last year, the Budget had prioritised pandemic recovery, boosting spending on healthcare and infrastructure

INCOME TAX

Experts expect Union Budget 2025 to raise the standard deduction for salaried individuals and pensioners to Rs 1 lakh, increase the basic tax exemption limit under the new tax regime from Rs 3 lakh to Rs 5 lakh, and introduce a 25% tax slab for income between Rs 15-20 lakh. Additionally, the government may overhaul the Income Tax Act of 1961 to simplify the tax process and make it more efficient.

EDUCATION

Education sector expects increased funding for National Education Policy (NEP) implementation, emphasising digital education, modernised classrooms, and rural internet access. Priorities include teacher training, skilling initiatives integrated with higher education, and expanded internships to enhance employability. The sector also seeks GST reduction on online education services from 18% to make learning more affordable. These measures aim to modernise education, bridge the digital divide, and improve access and quality nationwide.

FINANCE

The finance sector expects Union Budget 2025 to focus on fiscal stability, reducing the fiscal deficit, and simplifying tax structures. Key expectations include making the new tax regime more appealing, boosting investment through increased allocations for job creation and skill development, and expanding the PLI scheme. Additionally, measures to simplify compliance and resolve disputes are anticipated to enhance global competitiveness and drive economic growth.

PHARMACEUTICAL & HEALTH

The pharmaceutical and healthcare sector expects a 2.5%-3% hike in the healthcare budget, adding Rs 20,000 crore to improve underserved areas. Key proposals include reintroducing weighted tax benefits to boost R&D in vaccines and generic drugs, reducing GST on health insurance premiums from 18% to 12%, and raising Section 80D deduction limits to Rs 75,000 for individuals and Rs 1.5 lakh for senior citizens. These measures aim to make healthcare more affordable, encourage insurance adoption, and reduce the strain on public health systems.

HOSPITALITY SECTOR

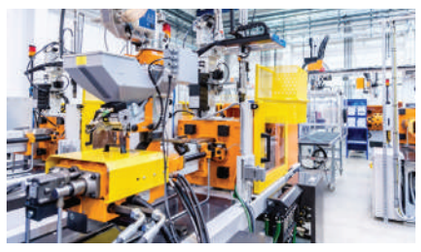
The hospitality sector expects 'industry' status, improve access to financial resources, and boost infrastructure investment, particularly for Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) tourism. Key expectations include rationalising tax rates, permitting GST credits for hotel construction, and offering state-level incentives to attract investments.

AUTOMOBILE

Automobile industry seeks government support to revitalise manufacturing and boost EV adoption. Key proposals include Rs 9,000 crore for domestic battery manufacturing and reducing GST on EVs from 18% to 5% to make them more affordable. The sector also calls for Rs 10,000 crore for the PM E-DRIVE scheme to expand EV charging infrastructure, tax cuts on EVs and components, and continued PLI scheme support. Additional priorities include workforce upskilling, dedicated EV charging stations, and improved road networks to drive long-term growth and reduce import dependency.

AGRICULTURE

Farmers are expecting Union Budget 2025 to include a 15% increase in the agriculture budget to boost rural incomes and control inflation. Key proposals include promoting hybrid seed development for higher yields and climate resilience, as well as investing in infrastructure to improve storage and supply chains, reducing post-harvest losses. Financial support is anticipated through the expansion of subsidised arm loans and crop insurance schemes to provide security against unforeseen events. These measures aim to empower farmers, increase agricultural productivity, and ensure food security across the nation. CropLife India, an association of 17 R&D driven crop science companies has urged the government to reduce the GST on agrochemicals to 12% and maintain a uniform 10% basic customs duty on technical raw materials and formulations.



MANUFACTURING

Manufacturing sector seeks 15% corporate tax rate extension for new manufacturing companies, increase infrastructure investment, and expand the PLI scheme to boost domestic production. Other priorities include promoting exports, streamlining trade processes, and providing MSME support through easier compliance, cash flow-based funding, and training programmes.

SPACE

The sector anticipates increased funding for deep-space exploration projects, building on the 18% budget hike for the Department of Space in 2024. It also emphasizes the need to extend the PLI scheme to space-grade components and grant GST exemptions for satellite launch services. Additionally, industry leaders suggest reducing tax rates on foreign borrowings, increasing space tech integration, and lowering Spectrum Usage Charges. These measures aim to strengthen India's competitiveness in the global space sector.

REAL ESTATE

The real estate industry seeks tax benefits for REITs, including the exemption of double taxation on dividend income. Revising the price cap for affordable homes to Rs 85 lakh in Mumbai and Rs 60-65 lakh in other metros. Experts also recommended increasing the home loan interest deduction limit from Rs2 lakh to Rs5 lakh. Developers advocate for a "single-window clearance system" to streamline approvals, while rental housing incentives and revisions to notional income taxation are also key focus areas.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

The sector expects increased investment in projects like solar, wind, and green hydrogen and tax incentives for green technologies such as solar panels and energy storage. There is also a push for funding energy storage solutions, easier access to financing through green bonds. The sector anticipates a clear decarbonisation roadmap to meet net-zero targets and a continued emphasis on energy efficiency programmes in industry and households.

TEXTILES AND APPAREL

This sector seeks funding for the PLI scheme to boost domestic manufacturing and exports. They also urged for tax rationalisation on inputs to reduce production costs and improve profitability. The industry hopes for measures to stabilise raw material prices, such as the establishment of a Cotton Price Stabilisation Fund. They have called for availability of raw materials at international competitive prices.

TECH INDUSTRY

Tech industry, represented by National Association of Software and Service Companies (Nasscom), expects tweaks to safe harbour rules, and creation of a central deeptech fund. They have also called for a common grant framework to support the deeptech startups, with specific funds for core technology validation and early commercialisation. Nasscom further demanded for the deferment of tax payments on Employee Stock Option Plans for all DPIIT-registered startups.

WOMEN

Women organisations have called for increased tax relief, simplified compliance, and incentives for women-led startups. Proposals also include flexible work arrangements, such as creches, and measures to improve financial inclusion by enhancing access to credit and services. Healthcare funding, especially for maternal health, and better educational and skill development opportunities are key demands. Safety and security measures, including stronger laws and improved policing, are expected, alongside expanded social security schemes for women, particularly pensions and insurance.

SENIOR CITIZENS

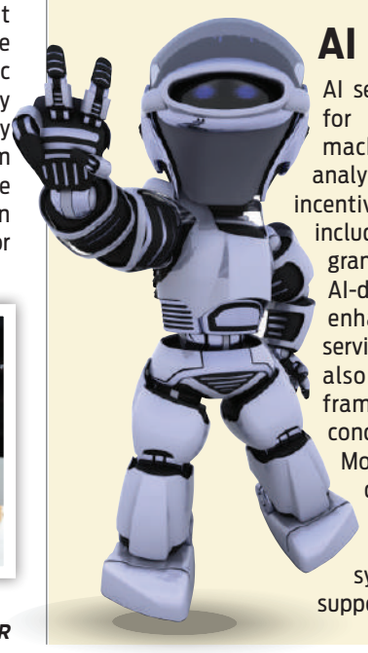
Senior citizens hope for GST relief on medical bills and health insurance policies, along with tax reductions or exemptions on annuity withdrawals from the National Pension Scheme. They also seek enhanced tax benefits for post-office savings accounts and tax exemptions on Senior Citizens Sav-ings Scheme (SCSS) interest to ease financial burdens. Additionally, they are optimistic about receiving concessions on train tickets.

SALARIED CLASS

The salaried class expects the basic tax exemption limit under the new income tax regime to rise from Rs 3 lakh to Rs 5 lakh. They also hope the current Rs 75,000 deduction will increase to Rs 1 lakh. The tax-free limit for National Pension System (NPS) investments could be hiked from Rs 50,000, with more flexible withdrawal rules. Another key expectation is raising the exemption limit for LTCG on equities from Rs 1.25 lakh to Rs 2 lakh or more, allowing investors to retain more returns.

DEFENCE

The defence sector seeks an allocation of 1.9%-2% of GDP, estimated at Rs 6.5 - Rs 7 lakh crore. The sector requests Rs 1.9 lakh crore for modernisation, including fighter jets and tanks, and emphasises boosting local manufacturing with 75 per cent of procurement sourced domestically. The focus is on self-reliance and strengthening India's defence capabilities under the 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' initiative, aiming to reduce dependency on foreign imports.



AI

AI sector seeks increased funding for research and development, machine learning, and data analytics. There is also a call for incentives to support AI startups, including tax relief, funding, and grants. They also seek funding for AI-driven projects in governance to enhance efficiency in public services and data management. It also expects a regulatory framework addressing privacy concerns and ethical standards. Moreover, there is a push for the development of AI infrastructure, such as high-performance computing systems and data centres, to support AI technologies.

RESEARCH: AMINA AFAQ, AARATI KRISHNA, SUBHALAKSHMI PR, PRIYANKA SAHARIA, SIDDHARTH SALDANHA DESIGN: SURENDHAR

Senior IAS officer LK Atheeq, who retired from his position as Additional Chief Secretary in the Finance Department, handed over the responsibilities to IAS officer Ritesh Kumar Singh on Friday. Atheeq will continue as Deputy Chief Secretary to the Chief Minister ***PHOTO: SALAR***

Illegal LPG gas unit raided, 80 cylinders seized

BENGALURU, 31 JAN: The Central Crime Branch (CCB) has dismantled an illegal LPG gas cylinder refilling operation in Jayanagar 1st Block, leading to the arrest of one individual. The raid, conducted following credible intelligence, resulted in the seizure of over Rs 4 lakh worth of goods, including 80 LPG cylinders, three refilling rods, and a weighing machine. The operation was based in a shop and warehouse within the Siddapura Police Station jurisdiction. While one suspect was apprehended, two others managed to escape, and efforts are ongoing to locate them. Investigations revealed that the accused were illegally acquiring both private and government-owned domestic LPG cylinders, refilling them into smaller cylinders, and selling them without proper authorisation. *—Salar News*

Exotic birds and animals seized at B'luru Airport

BENGALURU, 31 JAN

Customs officials at Kempegowda International Airport (KIA) have apprehended two female passengers arriving from Kuala Lumpur, who were allegedly attempting to smuggle an Albino Finlayson's squirrel and five exotic birds, including the Bali Myna. The women arrived in Bengaluru on Malaysia Airlines flight MH192 on 28 January and were intercepted by officials following a tip-off. During an inspection of their luggage, authorities uncovered the exotic creatures concealed within rectangular boxes in one of the suitcases. The seized species included the Bali Myna (Leucopsar rothschildi), the Albino Finlayson's squirrel (Callosciurus finlaysonii), and others, all of which are listed under Appendix II of CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora). *—Salar News*

Engg student killed in B'luru bike accident

BENGALURU, 31 JAN

A tragic road accident in the city has claimed the life of 20-year-old engineering student Rahul Gautham, who was riding pillion when the motorbike skidded and crashed. Rahul, a resident of Kolar district, was in his fifth semester at Dayananda Sagar Engineering College. The incident occurred around 11.30pm on Thursday while he was returning to his accommodation with his friend, Chirag, after socialising with friends in Anjanapura. As per the Talaghattapura traffic police, Chirag lost control of the motorcycle on Anjanapura 80-Feet Main Road. Both riders were thrown from the vehicle, and Rahul sustained severe head injuries, tragically dying at the scene. Chirag was taken to a nearby hospital, where he is currently receiving treatment and is reported to be in a stable condition. *—Salar News*

Lokayukta raids multiple cities in corruption cases

Raids targeted homes of govt officials in 7 corruption cases

BENGALURU, 31 JAN

The Karnataka Lokayukta has executed raids across multiple locations in Bengaluru, Belagavi, Chitradurga, Raichur, and Bagalkot, targeting a total of seven separate cases linked to corruption allegations. The operations, spearheaded by Belagavi Lokayukta SP Hanamantharay, were conducted in the Belagavi district at three sites: Anigol, Harugeri, and Bellad Bagewadi.

Notably, the residences of Sachin Manded, Sub-Registrar for Belagavi North Zone, and Sanjay Durgannavar, a veterinary doctor from Raibag Taluk, were among those raided. Both officials are being investigated for allegedly amassing assets beyond their declared income. Manded faces scrutiny over claims of illicit wealth, while Durgannavar's home in Raibag Taluk was also searched for evidence of corruption.

Officials conducted raids in Bengaluru, Belagavi, Chitradurga, Raichur, and Bagalkot ***PHOTO: ANI***

Lokayukta officials are carefully examining documents at both residences in an effort to unearth corroborating evidence. Further details regarding the raids are expected to emerge in due course.

In parallel developments, the state's BJP President, BY Vijayendra, heralded a "major victory" following the Enforcement Directorate's (ED) actions related to the Mysuru Urban Development Authority (MUDA) scam involving Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah. The ED has reportedly attached 142 immovable properties valued at approximately Rs 300 crore, linked to the case.

These properties were seized under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002, and are registered to various individuals purportedly involved in real estate. The ED initiated its investigation based on a First Information Report filed by Lokayukta Police in Mysore against Siddaramaiah and others.

Additionally, a Bengaluru special court has mandated a Lokayukta investigation into allegations concerning Siddaramaiah's involvement in the dubious allotment of 14 plots valued at Rs 56 crore to his wife, BM Parvathi, by MUDA. *—ANI*

'FUND UPPER BHADRA PROJECT'

K'taka seeks ₹11,495 cr spl grants in Budget

BENGALURU, 31 JAN

Special matching grants for the development of the backward region of Kalyana Karnataka, approval for the Mekedatu project and release of Rs 11,495 crore of special grants recommended by the 15th Finance Commission were among the suggestions and requests made by the Karnataka government during a pre-budget consultation with the Centre.

Last month, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman met finance ministers of states and union territories (UTs) to take their demands and suggestions for the Union Budget 2025-26, to be presented on 1 February 1.

In his presentation at the meeting, Karnataka Revenue Minister Krishna Byre Gowda on behalf of the state government led by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah sought release of Rs 5,300 crore promised in the Union Budget to Upper Bhadra project to provide water to drought prone central Karnataka and special matching grants for the development of backward region of Kalyana Karnataka and the global eco sensitive Western Ghats.

The state urged the Central government to shift from a "reimbursement-based" system to an "advance-release" model for the implementation of the centrally sponsored schemes and also proposed increasing the Central share of their honorariums to Rs 5,000 per month for ASHA workers and Rs 2,000 for Anganwadi helpers.

According to a statement shared by the Gowda's office on Friday, the minister suggested increasing Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana assistance from Rs 1.5 lakh to Rs five lakh for urban houses and from Rs 72,000 to Rs three lakh for rural houses.

Karnataka has requested additional railway lines, expedited projects, and Central support for 50 per cent of land acquisition and 100 per cent construction costs.

The state also urged approvals for road infrastructure proposals, including new ring roads and upgrades to National Highways.

CM demands 'just and proportional' funds

Ahead of the presentation of the Union Budget in Parliament, Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Friday urged the Centre to recognise the state's contribution and ensure 'just and proportional' resource distribution.

He also slammed the Union government over its 'discriminatory approach' towards Karnataka. Citing that states like Karnataka are at the forefront of development, the chief minister said, the states must receive adequate support. Listing the key demands in the statement, the CM that the 15th Finance Commission's tenure ends next year, yet the Centre has not released the Rs 5,495 crore special grant and Rs 6,000 crore state-specific grant recommended by the Commission.

He urged the Centre to immediately release the pending Rs 3,300 crore along with the full special grants for 2024-25 and 2025-26. *—PTI*

Jarkiholi announces ₹2L aid to Kumbh Mela victims

BELAGAVI, 31 JAN

PHOTO: ANI

The remains of Jyoti Hatrarwad, 44, and her daughter Megha Hatrarwad, 24, were cremated on Friday afternoon after being transported from Goa by road late on Thursday night. The district administration facilitated their repatriation, with Deputy Commissioner Mohammed Roshan and other officials receiving the bodies at the Belagavi Institute of Medical Sciences. Karnataka PWD Minister Satish Jarkiholi, who oversees the Belagavi district, has announced a financial compensation of Rs 2 lakh for each affected family.

This follows an earlier commitment from Belagavi North Congress legislator Asif Sait, who also pledged the same amount to the families.

The bodies of Arun Koparde, 61, and Mahadevi Bavanur, 48, arrived earlier on Thursday by flight and were cremated later that evening.

The community mourns the immense loss and continues to support the grieving families. *—Salar News*

100 YEAR CELEBRATION

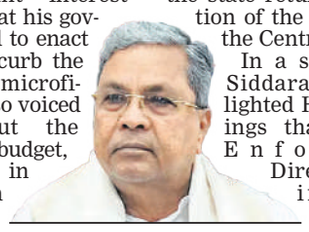
All women crew operate the Bengaluru-Mysuru Rajya Rani Express as part of the 100-year celebration of electric traction in Indian Railways, in the City on Friday ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

CM blames Centre over microfinance harassment

MYSURU, 31 JAN

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Friday attributed the surge in harassment by microfinance agencies in Karnataka to the Union government's cuts in funding. He stated that diminished state support drives vulnerable individuals to seek loans from these agencies, which often operate outside the bounds of regulatory guidelines set by the Reserve Bank of India. Siddaramaiah condemned BJP state president BY Vijayendra for making unfounded accusations against the state government and suggested that BJP leaders should instead urge Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to address the issue.

The Chief Minister expressed concerns regarding borrowers facing exorbitant interest rates, claiming that his government is poised to enact an ordinance to curb the misconduct of microfinance staff. He also voiced pessimism about the upcoming Union budget, citing inequities in tax devolution and cuts to NABARD grants, noting that the state returns only a fraction of the taxes it pays to the Centre.



In a separate matter, Siddaramaiah highlighted High Court findings that deemed the Enforcement Directorate's (ED) investigation into the MUDA case as illegal. The court's observations, he argued, vindicated his stance against the ED's involvement. He labelled the ED's actions as politically motivated efforts to undermine his administration. His wife, B M Parvathi, has successfully obtained a stay against the ED investigation pertaining to the MUDA scam. *—Salar News*

Cong to protest against ED over MUDA scam

MYSURU, 31 JAN

The Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee spokesperson, M. Lakshman, announced that the party intends to organise a significant protest against the Enforcement Directorate (ED). The ED is accused of attempting to implicate Chief Minister Siddaramaiah in the MUDA scam despite a lack of evidence.

Speaking at a press conference, Lakshman asserted that the ED's actions, seemingly influenced by directives from BJP and RSS leaders, aim to undermine the CM while disregarding irregularities that occurred under the previous BJP government.

Lakshman further criticised the ED for allegedly misrepresenting the value of the 14 sites, supposedly granted to BM Parvathi. He accused the union government of weaponising the ED against opposition leaders, noting the agency's low success rate in court. *—Salar News*

BJP leader alleges corruption in Bangalore Palace row

MYSURU, 31 JAN

Leader of Opposition in the Legislative Council Chalavadi Narayanaswamy lashed out Congress after the Governor Thawarchand Gehlot gave his assent for the Bangalore Palace Ordinance. Narayanaswamy accused the government of corruption, claiming that all developmental works in the State have come to a standstill.

He condemned the government for targeting the Mysuru royal family, saying they should not forget the contribution of the Maharajas of Mysuru. The government must abide by the Supreme Court's ruling of paying Rs 3,011 crore for the transferable development rights to the royal family, he said. "They should not attempt to escape the ruling by promulgating ordinance."

Speaking to reporters at a press conference held in the district BJP office, he accused the Congress government of having no control over its ministers. *—Salar News*

SNEHAMAYI GETS SIX MONTHS JAIL FOR CHEQUE BOUNCE

MYSURU, 31 JAN

PHOTO: ANI

The Third Additional Civil and JMFC Court in Mysuru has sentenced activist Snehamayi Krishna to six months imprisonment following a cheque bounce case. In 2015, Krishna borrowed money from local resident Kumar to fund a newspaper and other household expenses, issuing a cheque from the Merchant Cooperative Bank as repayment. However, when Kumar deposited the cheque, it bounced, prompting him to take legal action.

After reviewing the case, the court found Krishna guilty, stating she must either repay the owed amount or serve a six-month jail term. Speaking after the verdict, Krishna expressed her intention to challenge the ruling by appealing to a higher court.

In a related development, KPCC spokesperson M Lakshman announced intentions to protest with Congress activists outside the Commissioner of Police's office if authorities did not arrest Krishna, accusing them of being lenient towards her. The case has sparked significant attention within the local community, raising questions about accountability in financial transactions. *—Salar News*

KOLAR COMEDY

Man bets women can't walk 15km, loses ₹4L

KOLAR, 31 JAN

In a light-hearted challenge that turned serious, a middle-aged man in Kolar lost Rs 4 lakh with Rs 1 lakh each to four determined women who completed a 15-kilometre walk without stopping.

The incident unfolded on Tuesday night when Appi (name changed), a resident of Karanjikatte, engaged in conversation with neighbours after dinner.

In the course of their discussion, some local women expressed their desire to embark on a pilgrimage to Kedarnath and Badrinath. Appi, sceptical of their capabilities, remarked that the pilgrimage required considerable trekking, which he doubted they could manage.

Undeterred, the women insisted they possessed the stamina for long walks. In jest, Appi offered 10g of gold to any woman who could reach Narasapura—a distance of approximately 15km.

Kolar man loses a friendly bet with four women ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

Upon hearing this, the women opted for cash instead of gold, confident that Appi would not take them seriously. To their surprise, Appi agreed, and terms were established; if they completed the task without resting, they would receive one lakh rupees each, while stopping midway would cost them Rs 50,000.

The challenge commenced at approximately 10.40pm, with a car leading and following the participants to ensure they did not take breaks. Husbands joined the women for added support, alongside some enthusiastic bikers. Midway through the walk, Appi attempted to persuade them to quit by offering Rs 10,000 and later Rs 50,000, but the women remained resolute.

- Upon hearing this, the women opted for cash instead of gold, confident that Appi would not take them seriously. To their surprise, Appi agreed, and terms were established; if they completed task without resting, they would receive one lakh rupees each

Eventually, they reached Narasapura around midnight, much to the astonishment of Appi and his friends. True to his word, Appi handed over Rs 50,000 to each of the four women on the spot, promising to settle the remaining amount by the weekend, as confirmed by one winner's husband. *—Salar News*

Gang that befriended & duped people on FB held

BENGALURU, 31 JAN

In a significant crackdown against online fraud, the South-East Division Police have dismantled a cybercrime syndicate responsible for duping Facebook users by impersonating friends and extorting money.

Deputy Commissioner of Police Sarah Fathima announced on Friday that seven individuals have been arrested in connection with this scam, with authorities recovering numerous incriminating items, including nine mobile phones, 11 bank passbooks, eight cheque books, 31 ATM cards, and nine Aadhaar cards.

The investigation began when a resident received a friend request on Facebook from someone pretending to be an old acquaintance. Believing the profile to be genuine, the victim accepted the request. The fraudster, claiming to be stranded in Dubai, urgently solicited financial assistance for a return trip to India.

Over the following days, the perpetrator convinced the victim to deposit a considerable sum into their bank account, providing a fake Citibank transaction receipt that suggested a transfer of Rs 7,85,700 would soon follow. The fraudster later claimed to be in trouble with the Saudi police and requested an additional Rs 1.95 lakh. Trusting the story, the victim transferred Rs 1.5 lakh in several transactions before realising it was a scam.

Upon learning of the fraud, the victim reported it to the Adugodi Police Station. A swift investigation enabled authorities to identify and arrest the first suspect on January 17 in Belavadi village, Mysuru. Subsequent interrogations led to the capture of more gang members. DCP Fathima cautioned the public to verify friend requests and report any suspicious activities immediately. *—Salar News*

Pace of work tripled in govt's third term: Prez

Murmu in her speech said govt is committed to fulfil middle-class people's dream of owning home

NEW DELHI, 31 JAN

Addressing a joint session of Parliament on Friday, President Droupadi Murmu asserted that her government's third term had witnessed a threefold increase in the pace of work, pulling the economy out of "policy paralysis" and focusing on inclusive development.

Murmu highlighted major decisions being implemented swiftly, prioritising the welfare of the poor, middle class, youth, women, and farmers. She also paid tributes to the victims of the Kumbh Mela stampede in Prayagraj and former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, who passed away recently.

Listing the government's achievements, she announced that the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana would be expanded to provide homes for an additional three crore families. Farmers' incomes were being increased through fair pricing initiatives, and efforts were underway to make India the world's third-largest economy.

The President emphasised infrastructure growth, stating that the Udhampur-Baramulla-Srinagar Rail project was now complete, soon connecting Kashmir to Kanyakumari. She highlighted employment opportunities created through economic empowerment in the cooperative sector.

Murmu also pointed to key reforms such as One Nation, One Election and changes in Waqf board regulations. The government's commitment to middle-class homeownership, she said, remained strong.

On healthcare, Murmu announced that six crore senior citizens above 70 years would receive health insurance under Ayushman Bharat, while the government was improving cancer care by waiving customs duties on key medicines.

India's rising global stature was another focal point, with Murmu noting that key international groupings such as Quad, BRICS, and G20 recognized the country's economic and political stability. She lauded ISRO's achievements, including 100 missions launched from Sriharikota, and announced that India's first human spaceflight under Gaganyaan was imminent.

Murmu reiterated the government's focus on women-led development, aiming to create three crore 'Lakhpati Didis.' Additionally, she spoke about AI-driven innovation under the India AI Mission and highlighted India's growing metro rail network, now surpassing 1,000 km.

With a vision for rapid and inclusive growth, Murmu assured Parliament that her government remained committed to making India a global powerhouse. *—PTI*

President Droupadi Murmu addresses the joint sitting of both Houses of Parliament on the first day of the Budget Session, in New Delhi, on Friday **PHOTO: PTI**

Prez's House, BJP fume at Sonia; Cong defends her

NEW DELHI, 31 JAN

Congress leaders' comments on President Droupadi Murmu's address to the Parliament clearly hurt the dignity of the high office and therefore are unacceptable, the Rashtrapati Bhavan said on Friday.

The Rashtrapati Bhavan said, "While reacting to the media on the President's Address to the Parliament, some prominent leaders of the Congress party have made comments that clearly hurt the dignity of the high office, and are unacceptable."

BJP says Sonia's remarks 'deeply disrespectful'

Reacting sharply, BJP national president JP Nadda said in a post on X, "Sonia's use of the phrase 'poor thing' is deeply disrespectful and underscores the Opposition's continued disregard for the dignity of the highest constitutional office."

Hitting back, Congress leader Gaurav Gogoi said in a post X, "Sonia Gandhi's empathy for Hon'ble President Droupadi Murmu ji's health cannot be digested by the men in BJP."

My mother has utmost respect for Prez: Priyanka

Party general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra said, "My mother is a 78-year-old lady. She simply said that 'the President must have been tired reading such a long speech, poor thing'. She fully respects, in fact she has the utmost respect for her.. It is very unfortunate that this is twisted by the media. *—PTI*

Congress Parliamentary Party Chairperson Sonia Gandhi **PHOTO: PTI**

TMC worker shot dead in West Bengal's Naihati

KOLKATA, 31 JAN

A local Trinamool Congress worker was shot dead on Friday afternoon by unidentified assailants at Naihati in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district, police said. He died on the spot after getting shot in the head, they said. "Santosh Yadav was passing by the Gauripur area when the crime took place. He managed to snatch away the revolver from the first attacker after the initial incident of firing. However, he could not save himself as the other miscreants fired at him four times. One bullet hit him in the head," a police officer said. Yadav was declared "brought dead" when taken to the Hospital, he said. *—PTI*

TN to seek SC review on domicile reservation

CHENNAI, 31 JAN

The Tamil Nadu government has announced plans to file a review petition with the Supreme Court regarding its ruling on domicile-based reservation for postgraduate medical courses, deemed unconstitutional by the apex court. A three-judge bench consisting of Justices Hrishikesh Roy, Sudhanshu Dhulia, and SVN Bhatti stated that such reservations would infringe upon the fundamental rights of numerous students. Tamil Nadu Health and Family Welfare Minister Ma Subramanian emphasised that the state's 69 per cent reservation policy is crucial for ensuring social justice and expressed concerns that the ruling would undermine the state's rights. He noted that this decision would impact the existing 50 per cent quota for Tamil Nadu students and indicated ongoing discussions. *—PTI*

SP MP, workers booked over Ayodhya roadshow

AYODHYA, 31 JAN

A case has been filed against Samajwadi Party MP Dimple Yadav for allegedly breaching government regulations during a recent road show. The FIR was registered at the Inayat Nagar police station following a complaint from Sub-Inspector Alok Kumar Singh, which named party workers and Dimple Yadav as unidentified at the time. The complaint claims that there were more vehicles involved than allowed under government guidelines. Milkipur Circle Officer Shriyash Tripathi confirmed that the road show, which took place on Thursday, resulted in significant traffic congestion along both lanes of the Raebareli Highway, stretching from Kumarganj to Milkipur due to the large crowd. Police stated that an investigation is currently underway. *—PTI*

'1st time since 2014, no foreign butting in Parl'

NEW DELHI, 31 JAN

In a notable address, Prime Minister Narendra Modi stated that, for the first time since 2014, there have been no foreign attempts to "stoke a fire" in India ahead of a Parliament session. Speaking to reporters before the Budget session, Modi took a swipe at opposition parties, asserting that there have typically been attempts from abroad to incite unrest before each session over the past decade.

"This is the first session I am seeing in the last 10 years in which there has been no attempt to stoke a fire from any foreign corner," Modi remarked, signalling a shift in the political climate as his government prepares to present its first full-fledged budget on Saturday in its third term.

He expressed hopes that Goddess Lakshmi, symbolising wealth, would bless the poor and middle class during this significant occasion. Modi underscored his administration's commitment to an all-encompassing development agenda, focusing on innovation, inclusion, and investment.

Throughout the session, Modi anticipates the passage of numerous historic bills, particularly those aimed at empowering women and removing faith-based discrimination. He emphasised the importance of young MPs in shaping a developed India, urging them to seize the moment for active participation in the legislative process.

The Budget session commenced with President Droupadi Murmu addressing both Houses of Parliament. Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is set to unveil the Union Budget tomorrow. *—PTI*

Narendra Modi **PHOTO: PTI**

IN A MEET WITH EC

Referred to ammonia in Yamuna: Kejri

NEW DELHI, 31 JAN

AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal has submitted a response to the Election Commission (EC) addressing allegations that he claimed the Haryana government mixed "poison" in the Yamuna water supplied to Delhi. In his six-page reply, Kejriwal clarified that his remarks referred to the "unprecedented high levels of ammonia" detected in the raw water.

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) chief, accompanied by Delhi and Punjab counterparts Atishi and Bhagwant Mann, delivered his response to EC officials while presenting three bottles of ammonia-contaminated water to underscore his claims.

Kejriwal accused Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini of orchestrating a "conspiracy" to disrupt the upcoming Delhi Assembly polls by sending polluted water to the capital. He noted that ammonia levels had surged from 3.2 ppm on 15 January to 7 ppm by January 26-27, alleging Saini's inaction despite discussions about the water quality.

In a separate campaign event, Kejriwal touted AAP's welfare schemes, claiming each Delhi household saves an average of Rs 25,000 per month. He announced plans to launch the 'Bachat Patra' initiative to quantify these savings, asserting that AAP's governance contrasts starkly with the BJP's approach, which he accused of favouring corporate interests. *—PTI*

Former Delhi CM and AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal addresses the media **PHOTO: PTI**

> **AAP stalling Delhi's growth, using city as its 'political ATM**
>
> -Narendra Modi, Prime Minister

SC orders ECI to preserve polling video clips

NEW DELHI, 31 JAN

The Supreme Court has instructed the Election Commission of India (ECI) to preserve video recordings of polling stations while legal challenges against the increase in maximum voters per station—from 1,200 to 1,500—are underway. A bench, led by Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna, granted the ECI three weeks to respond to a public interest litigation (PIL) filed by Indu Prakash Singh, who claims the decision was arbitrary and lacked data support. Singh argues the change could hinder voter turnout during upcoming elections in Maharashtra, Bihar, and Delhi, potentially leading to long waiting times at polling booths. *—PTI*

India can't continue Israel & Palestine balancing policy for long: Ex-diplomat

JAIPUR, 31 JAN

Former diplomat **Navtej Sarna** on Friday said India has maintained its balancing act with Israel and Palestine for a long time but raised doubts if it can continue to do so in the aftermath of the 7 October attack by Hamas.

Speaking at the ongoing Jaipur Literature Festival, Sarna said the increasing exchange between India and Israel, especially since the terror attack in 2023, has defined India's position as it "abstained from some resolutions" that "the global South" took against Israel.

The former diplomat said the Indian position on Israel has evolved quite distinctly and in stages over the last 75 years. He said India was never in favour of the partition of Palestine or of the formation of a state based on religion.

"Currently, India has a very strong relationship with Israel, both in strategy and diplomatic terms. And India has largely been careful to balance this with its support for the Palestinian cause both in terms of aid and statements in the UN," Sarna

"It is inevitable that you cannot maintain this balance. In recent years, there has been a very close government to government connect between India and Israel. Israel is today arguably your second largest supplier of defence equipment," he added.

The increasing exchange between the two countries, especially since the Hamas attack, has defined India's position, as it "abstained from some resolutions" that "the global South" took against Israel. *—PTI*

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

EX-VCK'S AADHAV ARJUNA JOINS VIJAY'S TVK

CHENNAI, 31 JAN

Aadhav Arjuna, the son-in-law of lottery mogul Santiago Martin, who recently quit the Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi, on Friday joined actor-politician Vijay-led Tamizhaga Vetri Kazhagam and he was appointed as the party's election campaign strategist.

TVK President Vijay, in a party release said Aadhav Arjuna, appointed as the party's "election campaign management general secretary," would work with "his political strategist, John Arokiasamy."

He made it clear that Arjuna would formulate campaign strategies. *—PTI*

3 Indians who travelled to Iran for business missing

NEW DELHI, 31 JAN

Three Indian nationals went missing in Iran and New Delhi has taken up the matter strongly with Tehran, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said on Friday.

MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said the Indians had travelled to Iran for business purposes and lost contact with their families shortly after their arrival in that country.

"We are in regular touch with the families of the three missing Indian nationals," he said.

"We have raised the matter with the Iranian Embassy in Delhi and with the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tehran," he said.

PHOTO: X

Jaiswal said the MEA and the embassy of India in Tehran have strongly taken up the matter with the Iranian government.

"Hopefully we will get assistance from the Iranian authorities in locating the missing nationals and ensuring their safety," he added.

It is learnt that the three Indians reportedly travelled to Iran in December. *—PTI*

GUNFIGHT IN POONCH

Army foils infiltration bid, kills 2 LeT terrorists in J&K

JAMMU, 31 JAN

Two heavily armed terrorists linked to the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) were killed during a gunfight as Indian Army troops thwarted a significant infiltration attempt along the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch district, officials reported on Friday.

The encounter occurred in the Khari Karmara area of Poonch on Thursday, prompting a large-scale search operation that continued into the afternoon, according to sources. "Terrorist movement was detected last night at the Line of Control in the Poonch sector. Alert troops swiftly engaged the infiltrating terrorists, triggering an intense and heavy firefight," stated the Army's Jammu-based White Knight Corps on X (formerly Twitter).

The operation, which extended through the night, led to the neutralisation of both terrorists, with extensive results including the recovery of numerous weapons and military supplies. Lt Gen M.V. Sachindra Kumar, General Officer Commanding-in-chief of the Udhampur-based Northern Command, praised the White Knight Corps for their rapid and effective response, underscoring the Army's commitment to maintaining a terror-free environment in Jammu and Kashmir.

Officials confirmed that the bodies of the terrorists were retrieved from the gunfight scene, with initial investigations indicating their affiliation with the proscribed LeT outfit. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

PHOTO: PTI

BJP reports Rs 1,737.68 crore spending for 2024 LS polls

NEW DELHI, 31 JAN

BJP has reported an expenditure of Rs 1,737.68 crore for the upcoming 2024 Lok Sabha elections, as submitted in a financial report to the Election Commission of India.

Of this total, Rs 884.45 crore was allocated for general party propaganda, while candidate-related expenses accounted for Rs 853.23 crore. Media advertisements cost the party Rs 611.50 crore, which covered print, electronic media, and bulk SMS campaigns. The BJP also spent Rs 55.75 crore on posters and publicising materials. Moreover, Rs 19.84 crore went towards the organisation of public meetings and rallies. Travel for star campaigners amounted to Rs 168.92 crore, with additional costs of Rs 2.53 crore for other leaders. *—PTI*

Most Mahayuti ministers are 'tainted': Patole

MUMBAI, 31 JAN

Nana Patole, the President of the Maharashtra Congress, has accused 65 percent of ministers in the Mahayuti government of being "tainted."

Speaking to reporters in Nagpur, Patole claimed that despite the cabinet being sworn in last month, most ministers have yet to commence their duties.

He expressed concern over the distress faced by farmers growing soybean, cotton, onion, and those involved in dairy farming, stating that unemployment levels are alarmingly high. Patole lambasted the BJP-Shiv Sena-NCP government for its apparent indifference to these pressing issues. *—PTI*

The UP govt yet again used bulldozers, but this time to reportedly clear belongings of the deceased pilgrims at Kumbh Mela. One survivor claimed even bodies were mixed in the debris. While the govt says only 30 died in the stampede, the actual number remains a mystery. Here is what we know:

MAHA MISMANAGEMENT SNUFFS OUT LIVES

WHY DID THE STAMPEDE HAPPEN?

- On 'Mauni Amavasya', 10 cr people were scheduled to take a dip
- Devotees rushed to the main bathing area at Sangam--confluence of three rivers--rather than spreading out.
- Clear lack of management is the reason behind the disaster.
- The path leading to Sangam is only 50m wide. It was barricaded to avoid people spilling over to other paths for movement of vehicles and ambulances.
- 28 bridges were shut to the public, but open to VIPs.
- Devotes were forced to sleep on the ghats.
- At 2am, a rush of devotees stepped on people sleeping.
- In a viral video, Prayagraj Divisional Commissioner Vijay Vishwas Pant is seen instructing the pilgrims to "get up before a stampede breaks out".

BULLDOZER TO THE RESCUE

- According to Lallantop, the govt rushed in bulldozers to clear the deceased devotees' clothes, blankets and slippers. Bulldozers also dumped the bodies into tractors.
- Survivors claim that bodies were lying around for hours with no police around. Reuters reported a police saying the excess bodies were unrelated deaths.

1 MONTH FOR PROBE

- UP has given a month for the judicial panel to submit its probe report. But why so long? The probe in Hathras stampede that killed 121 on 2 July was completed by 9 July.

PILGRIMS STRANDED FOR 35 HOURS

- After the stampede, devotees who wanted to leave Prayagraj were stuck in buses for at least 30 hours, unable to travel just 7km.
- 2L vehicles were stopped on highways leading to Prayagraj.

VIPS FIRST PLEASE

- Devotees claimed that common people had to walk 15-20 km to reach the ghat but VIPs were allowed to drive up in their vehicles.
- Print reports that VIPs have exclusive spots to take a tip for Rs 10,000.
- Luxurious camps are set up for VIPs, with an add on of enjoying sunset at Sangam, sans the crowd.

MORE STAMPEDES?

According to cops, another stampede 3km away from Sangam killed

7 people

but govt is mum about it. There are also reports of a 3rd stampede in Sector 10 near the Sangam

30
Total known deaths till now

ALL TALKS, NO SHOW, AND POOP EVERYWHERE

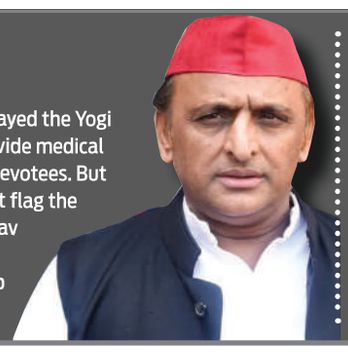
CM Yogi Adityanath boasted that Maha Kumbh will generate $2 lakh crore. He said 1,60,000 tents and 1,50,000 toilets were prepared. However, the reality seems to be different. In a video, a pilgrim shows the ghat littered with human faeces due to the lack of toilets.

A PHOTO OP

The Frontline quoted a cop saying that Yogi visited the site 10-12 times, along with his Cabinet colleagues, to take credit. Even Home Minister Amit Shah made a visit for photo opportunities.

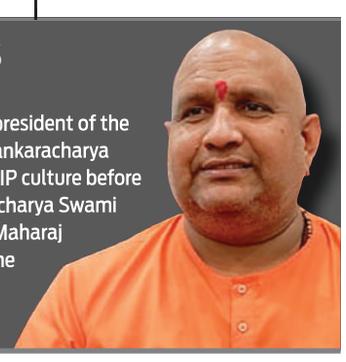
OPPN OUTCRY TOO LATE

SP Chief Akhilesh Yadav flayed the Yogi govt and asked him to provide medical care, food and clothes to devotees. But why did the Opposition not flag the glaring lapses earlier? Yadav himself used the VIP arrangements to take a dip in Sangam.



SHANKARACHARYAS BLAME YOGI

Swami Anand Swaroop Maharaj, president of the Shankaracharya Parishad and Shankaracharya Trust, raised concerns about the VIP culture before the incident. Jagadguru Shankaracharya Swami Avimukteshwaranand Saraswati Maharaj tore into Yogi over his silence on the number of deaths. He termed it betrayal of the Sanatanis.



RESEARCH: ANUSHREE CHAKRABORTY, AMINA AFAQ *DESIGN: G VISHWANATHA*

PHOTO: X

27 from B'desh arrested in Kochi, largest in nation

KOCHI, 31 JAN

27 Bangladeshi nationals who were illegally staying and working near Kochi have been arrested, police said on Friday. They were arrested in a joint operation carried out by Ernakulam Rural Police and the Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS) in the North Paravur area in the Ernakulam district. The Bangladeshi nationals were posing as migrants from West Bengal and working at various locations. The police and ATS were acting on a tip-off in what might be the largest arrest of Bangladeshi nationals within the month. The arrests were part of an ongoing special operation, 'Operation Clean,' launched by Ernakulam Rural District Police Chief Vaibhav Saxena after the arrest of 28-year-old Thaslima Begum two weeks ago. With these arrest, the total number Bangladeshis detained in Ernakulam this month rose to 34. *—PTI*

States on edge as Telangana sees 1st case of GBS

HYDERABAD, 31 JAN

A woman from Siddipet district in Telangana has been diagnosed with Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS), a rare nerve disorder, following the recent outbreak in Pune and surrounding areas, making it the first known case in the state.

According to a statement issued by KIMS Hospital here on Friday, the patient has no travel history to Pune. "A 25-year-old woman from Siddipet, Telangana, is currently admitted and is put on a ventilator support treatment at KIMS Hospital after being diagnosed with GBS," it said.

According to Consultant Neurologist Dr Praveen Kumar Yada, "Despite the high prevalence of this disease in Pune, Maharashtra, the patient has no history of travel to Pune, nor does anyone in her family have a history of this condition. The GBS occurs when the body's immune system mistakenly attacks its own nervous system after fever or loose motions."

The woman initially received treatment at another hospital for a week, but as her condition worsened, she was shifted to KIMS Hospital for advanced medical care. *—PTI*

MAN DIES OF GBS IN PUNE

A 36-year-old man diagnosed with Guillain-Barré Syndrome died in a civic-run hospital in Maharashtra's Pune district, taking the number of suspected GBS fatalities to three in the state, officials said on Friday. The patient, who worked as a cab driver, was admitted to the hospital in Pimpri Chinchwad on 21 January. *—PTI*

'SCHOOL SUPPRESSING TRUTH'

Kerala teen kills self after ragging, mom says was made to lick toilet

ERNAKULAM, 31 JAN

A fifteen-year-old boy died by suicide on 15 January after allegedly being severely bullied in Global Private School in Thiruvaniyoor, Ernakulam.

The mother, Rajna PM, has filed a police complaint and submitted a petition to the Chief Minister's office. She claimed that her son had been subjected to extreme bullying and endured horrific humiliation. She said her son had been forced to lick a toilet seat and that his head shoved into a toilet when it was being flushed.

Rajna has claimed that the school authorities are trying to supress the truth in order to protect its identity. In an Instagram post, she wrote, "Mihir was subjected to brutal ragging, bullying and physical assault," she said. "They didn't end the cruelty even after his death. A shocking screenshot reveals the extent of their cruelty. They messaged and celebrated his death." An Instagram page titled Justice for Mihir was created by his friends and classmates but was later deleted, which Rajna believes is due to school authorities pressuring students. She feared that a delay in gathering digital evidence would allow the perpetrators to cover their tracks.

The boy committed suicide by jumping from the 26th floor at his home, just one hour after he returned from school on 15 Jan. *—Salar News*

Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416, SAHAI at 080-25497777 for support.

SC rejects plea for conducting 'Urs' in Somnath

NEW DELHI, 31 JAN

The Supreme Court on Friday rejected an application seeking permission to conduct Urs festival from 1 February to 3 February at a now demolished dargah in Gujarat's Gir Somnath district. The bench of Justices BR Gavai and Augustine George Masih said the prayer in the application cannot be granted without hearing the main matter.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for Gujarat authorities, said that all the unauthorised constructions, including temples on land belonging to the government were demolished. Mehta submitted that no activities, including Hindu rituals, were being permitted on said land.

The counsel, appearing for the applicant, said there had been a dargah on the land but authorities demolished it. They claimed that the tradition of conduction Urs at the dargah had been going on for many years.

On 27 January, the top court said that it would, after three weeks, hear the pleas, including a contempt petition against the Gujarat authorities for allegedly demolishing residential and religious structures in Gir Somnath district without its prior nod. *—PTI*

WOMAN CHASED, STABBED OUTSIDE EATERY IN KOLKATA

KOLKATA, 31 JAN

A woman died after she was chased and allegedly stabbed multiple times outside a popular eatery in full public view by three people, including a minor, in Kolkata, police said.

The victim, Rofiya Saquil, in her 20s, was reportedly dragged out from a car next to the eatery and chased before being stabbed multiple times on the neck by a teenager on Thursday evening. The teenager was accompanied by his mother and 22-year-old man, who had reportedly followed the woman in a separate vehicle. All three suspects were later arrested by the police.

Terrified eyewitnesses saw the profusely bleeding woman running for her life and screaming for help. She was chased down by the attackers and pinned to a wall where they continued with the assault, police said.

The police are probing the possible angle of an extra-marital affair between the woman and Mohammed Fahrukh Ansari, whose family members are suspected to have carried out the attack, as motive behind the crime. The incident took place around 8.30pm after the woman arrived at the dhaba accompanied by Ansari.

Ansari, who is now absconding, was identified woman attacker's husband. *—PTI*

Find another sucker nation: Trump warns BRICS

Trump wants commitment from 'seemingly hostile' nations to avoid replacing US dollar

WASHINGTON, 31 JAN

President Donald Trump has once again warned that he will impose 100 per cent tariffs against BRICS nations if they attempt to replace the US dollar in international trade, telling them to go and find "another sucker nation."

Trump said he wanted a commitment from these "seemingly hostile" countries that they would neither create a new BRICS currency nor back any other currency to replace the "mighty" US dollar.

"They can go find another sucker nation. There is no chance that BRICS will replace the US dollar in international trade, or anywhere else, and any country that tries should say hello to tariffs, and goodbye to America!" Trump threatened.

Meanwhile, Trump is declining to say whether he intends to maintain current US troop levels in Syria.

"We'll make a determination on that," Trump told reporters on Thursday when asked if he intends to withdraw US troops deployed to Syria to fight the Islamic State group. "

He also has said that birth right citizenship was primarily intended for the children of slaves and not for the whole world to "come in and pile" into the US. PTI

Senate confirms Doug Burgum as interior secretary

The Senate confirmed Doug Burgum as interior secretary late Thursday after tapped the North Dakota billionaire to spearhead the Republican administration's ambitions to boost fossil fuel production. The vote was 79-18.

Trump also picked Burgum to chair a new National Energy Council that's tasked with achieving American "energy dominance." He would have a seat on the National Security Council — a first for the interior secretary.

Panama's president says there will be no negotiation about ownership of canal

Panama President Jose Raul Mulino said Thursday there will be no negotiation with the United States over ownership of the Panama Canal, and he hopes US Secretary of State Marco Rubio's upcoming visit will allow them to focus on shared interests including migration and combating drug trafficking.

"It's impossible, I can't negotiate," Mulino said when asked about returning the canal to US control. "That is done. The canal belongs to Panama."

Rubio is scheduled to meet with Mulino Sunday and visit the canal. —*PTI*

President Donald Trump signs a document in the Oval Office at the White House **PHOTO: PTI**

Trump: Tariffs on Canada, Mexico coming on Saturday

WASHINGTON, 31 JAN

US President Donald Trump has announced plans to impose on Saturday a 25 per cent tariff on Canada and Mexico, its two neighbouring countries, and is also in the process of considering a similar measure against China.

Trump said he would make a decision on Thursday night about whether to include oil in the list of tariffed items.

"We will be announcing the tariffs on Canada and Mexico for a number of reasons," the president told reporters in the Oval Office of the White House on Thursday.

He cited illegal immigration, smuggling of drugs and the massive subsidies that the US gives to Canada and Mexico in the form of deficits as the reasons for the tariffs.

"I will be putting the tariff of 25 per cent on Canada and, separately, 25 per cent on Mexico. We will really have to do that because we have very big deficits with those countries. Those tariffs may or may not rise with time," said the president.

Responding to a question, Trump said he would decide Thursday night whether to include oil among the items subject to tariffs. —*PTI*

'Banning gun sales to under 21 unconstitutional'

BATON ROUGE, 31 JAN

A US appeals court on Thursday ruled against a federal law requiring young adults to be 21 to buy handguns, finding it violated the Second Amendment.

The ruling, handed down by a panel of three judges on the conservative 5th US Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans, comes amid major shifts in the national firearm legal landscape following a landmark US Supreme Court decision that expanded gun rights in 2022.

The court found that people aged 18-to-20 should not be prohibited from buying guns.

"Ultimately, the text of the Second Amendment includes eighteen-to-twenty-year-old individuals among the people' whose right to keep and bear arms is protected," the court wrote in their ruling. The ruling sends the case back to a lower court judge.

The Supreme Court, meanwhile, decided to keep a federal gun law on the books last year. The high court overturned a different ruling from the 5th Circuit and upheld a law intended to protect victims of domestic violence. —*PTI*

Kash greets parents with 'Jai Shri Krishna'

Kashyap 'Kash' Patel, US President Donald Trump's FBI nominee, introduced his parents and greeted them with "Jai Shri Krishna" during his Senate Judiciary Committee confirmation hearing on Thursday. Patel expressed gratitude to his family for traveling from India to support him. When asked by Senator Lindsey Graham if he had faced racism, Patel confirmed he had experienced discrimination growing up. He recalled receiving racial slurs, including being called a "detestable sand nigger". —*PTI with agencies*

Italy blocks DeepSeek on app stores

MILAN, 31 JAN

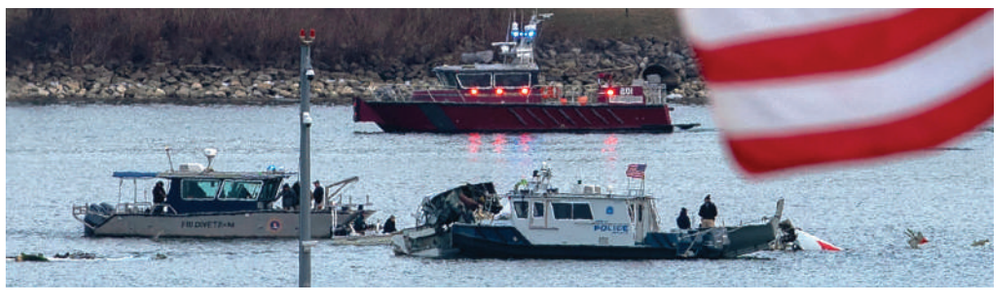
Italy's data protection authority on Thursday blocked access to the Chinese AI application DeepSeek to protect users' data and announced an investigation into the companies behind the chatbot. The authority, called Garante, expressed dissatisfaction with DeepSeek's response to its initial query about what personal data is collected, where it is stored and how users are notified. "Contrary to the authority's findings, the companies declared that they do not operate in Italy, and that European legislation does not apply to them," the statement said, noting that the app had been downloaded by millions in just a few days. —*PTI*

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

Ortega & Murillo named co-prez in Nicaragua

MEXICO CITY, 31 JAN

Nicaragua's Congress has approved a controversial constitutional reform that designates President Daniel Ortega and Vice President Rosario Murillo as "co-presidents," effectively consolidating their family's control over the nation. This reform also extends the presidential term from five to six years, raising concerns about the erosion of democratic norms. The measure, which passed with little opposition from the Sandinista party—dominant in Congress—further facilitates succession plans for Murillo. Critics, including human rights advocates, argue that this move undermines what remains of the country's checks and balances, which have already been severely weakened following widespread crackdowns after mass protests in 2018. Murillo hailed the reform as a strengthening of "the model of people's President and direct democracy."—*PTI*



A diving team and police boat are seen around a wreckage site in the Potomac River from Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport **PHOTO: PTI**

Staffing in tower was 'not normal' during US collision

ARLINGTON, 31 JAN

A report by the Federal Aviation Administration says staffing in the air traffic control tower was "not normal" at time of the midair collision near Washington.

The report was obtained Thursday by The Associated Press.

The collision between an Army helicopter and an American Airlines flight from Kansas killed all 67 people aboard the two aircraft, officials said, as they scrutinised the actions of the military pilot after the country's worst aviation disaster.

Meanwhile, at least two Indian-origin people are among the 67 people killed in a midair collision, according to media reports.

Vikesh Patel, a GE Aerospace engineer and Asra Hussain Raza, a Washington DC-based consultant were on the doomed American Airlines flight 5342.

Patel, from Greater Cincinnati, had recently switched jobs at the company and was an MRO Transformational Leader who travelled around the country, according to his LinkedIn page. Raza, 26, was one of several victims killed, her father-in-law, Dr Hashim Raza, told CNN. —*PTI*

Released Thai hostages in 'fair' health: Israeli docs

BEER YAAKOV, 31 JAN

The mother of Surasak Rumnao, one of the Thai hostages released from Gaza after over a year, initially failed to recognise her son during a Facebook livestream due to his drastic changes in appearance. Surasak, 32, was kidnapped from Yesha, Israel, during the 7 October attacks.

Khammee Lamnao expressed her overwhelming joy, saying, "I was so happy that I could not eat anything." Surasak, alongside four other Thai men, was welcomed by Israeli medical staff and supporters as they arrived at a hospital near Tel Aviv for medical assessments.

The release was part of a larger exchange involving three Israeli hostages and the release of 110 Palestinian prisoners. During the conflict, 31 Thai nationals were captured, making them the largest group of foreign hostages. Earlier, 23 Thais were released during a ceasefire deal in November.

Thai Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra expressed gratitude to various nations for their role in negotiations, while Israel designated the released Thais as terror victims.

Efforts continue for the remaining hostages, including one Thai, one Nepali, and one Tanzanian. —*PTI*

The release was part of a larger exchange involving three Israeli hostages and the release of 110 Palestinian prisoners **PHOTO: X**

Satellite images reveal China's wartime complex

TAIPEI, 31 JAN

Satellite imagery has revealed China's construction of a significant wartime military complex in the capital, Beijing, according to US officials, as reported by Taiwan News. The extensive 1,500-acre site, suspected to have begun construction in mid-2024, features potential bunkers designed to shield Chinese leaders during conflicts. Renny Babiarz, a former analyst at the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, indicated the presence of possible underground facilities linked by passageways, though further analysis is required. While no military activity is currently evident at the site, strict warnings against drones and photography are in place. This development reportedly aims to enhance protection against US "bunker buster" munitions despite President Xi Jinping's denials of any invasion plans. —*ANI*

AFTER 47 DAYS

Gwadar protest in Pak ends after negotiation talks

A seven-point agreement was formalised between the two parties, outlining key commitments from the district administration **PHOTO: ANI**

GWADAR, 31 JAN

After 47 days of protests, an alliance of political parties in Gwadar has suspended its sit-in following successful negotiations with district authorities. The decision was announced on Thursday, with protest leaders agreeing to halt their demonstrations until the month of Ramazan, provided that the district administration addresses their grievances within a one-month timeframe.

A seven-point agreement was formalised between the two parties, outlining key commitments from the district administration. These include measures to combat illegal trawling, reduce load-shedding, ensure 17 hours of electricity daily, allocate a dedicated area for local fishermen, expedite ongoing projects by the Gwadar Development Authority (GDA), and guarantee a steady supply of clean drinking water for residents.

- Despite the agreement, protesters continue to express their concerns regarding the prolonged closure of the Iranian border for trade in oil and other goods

The negotiations, which involved Gwadar's Additional Deputy Commissioner Dr Abdul Shakoor and other significant local figures, aimed to alleviate the impact of prolonged protests on daily life in the region.

Despite the agreement, protesters continue to express their concerns regarding the prolonged closure of the Iranian border for trade in oil and other goods. This closure has jeopardised the livelihoods of many residents, with demonstrators urging the immediate removal of a new token system at the Kantani Hor border. —*ANI*

Sweden extends $1.23B defence package to Ukraine

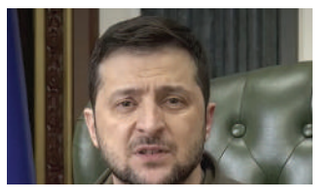
KYIV, 31 JAN

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy expressed gratitude to Sweden for extending its 18th and largest defence package to Ukraine to date, valued at 13.5 billion SEK (approximately $1.23 billion). In a post on X, Zelenskyy highlighted that the military aid would address urgent needs within the Ukrainian army and bolster the country's defensive capabilities.

He stated, "We deeply appreciate that this military aid meets the urgent needs of the Ukrainian army and significantly contributes to strengthening our defence capabilities." The package aims to enhance long-range capabilities and support local weapons production in Ukraine.

Zelenskyy warned that threats from Russia would not cease without a response, emphasising the importance of a united front to ensure peace and protect lives along the eastern borders.

In a related development, Zelenskyy provided updates on a recent Russian drone strike in Sumy, where a residential building was devastated, resulting in nine fatalities and injuries to thirteen others, including a child. —*ANI*



President Zelenskyy **PHOTO: X**

Myanmar military extends state of emergency by 6 months

BANGKOK, 31 JAN

Myanmar's military government on Friday announced another six-month extension of its mandate to rule in preparation for elections it has said will be held this year, as the country enters its fifth year of crisis.

However, it did not announce an exact date for the polls.

The military declared a state of emergency on 1 February, 2021, when it arrested the country's leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, and top officials from her government in an army takeover which reversed years of progress toward democracy after five decades of earlier military rule.

The takeover sparked an armed resistance movement, with powerful ethnic minority militias and people's defense forces that support Myanmar's main opposition now controlling large parts of the country.

State-run MRTV television reported on Friday that the National Defence and Security Council decided unanimously to grant an extension of emergency rule after Senior Gen. Ming Aung Hlaing, the head of the military government, argued that more time was needed to restore stability to the country to hold elections. —*PTI*

Landslide claims lives of miners in southern Mali

BAMAKO, 31 JAN

A devastating landslide engulfed a group of predominantly female gold miners in Mali, leading to several fatalities, according to the governor's office of the Koulikoro region. Governor Col. Lamine Kapory Sanogo stated that the miners were excavating for gold when the surrounding dike collapsed, allowing water and mud to inundate the area. The incident occurred at an artisanal gold mine in southern Mali on Wednesday. While the exact number of casualties has not been disclosed, reports confirmed that several miners lost their lives. This marks yet another tragic event in Mali's mining sector, which has previously seen fatal accidents. Mali is one of Africa's top three gold producers.—*PTI*

64 HOURS & 6 MINUTES

Sunita Williams breaks record for spacewalking time by woman

WASHINGTON, 31 JAN

Indian-origin astronaut Sunita Williams has broken the record for total spacewalking time by a woman by logging 62 hours and 6 minutes of spacewalk.

Williams and her colleague Butch Wilmore, who have been stranded on the International Space Station (ISS) since June 2024, conducted a spacewalk on Thursday.

The duo ventured outside the ISS to remove degraded radio communications hardware and collect samples that may show whether microorganisms exist on the exterior of the orbiting laboratory.

The spacewalk began at 7.43am Eastern Time (ET) and concluded at 1:09 pm ET, lasting 5 hours and 26 minutes.

It was the ninth spacewalk for Williams and the fifth for Wilmore.

"NASA astronaut Suni WIlliams just surpassed former astronaut Peggy Whitson's total spacewalking time of 60 hours and 21 minutes," NASA said in a post on X.

She surpassed Whitson's record for total spacewalking time by a female astronaut. Williams now has 62 hours and 6 minutes of total spacewalk time, fourth on NASA's all-time list, according to NASA.

In 2012, during a trip to the ISS, Williams became the first person to finish a triathlon in space, during which she simulated swimming using a weight-lifting machine and ran on a treadmill while strapped in by a harness so she wouldn't float away.

Williams, 59, and Wilmore went on what was meant to be an eight-day mission to the ISS aboard Boeing's Starliner in June 2024.

NASA plans to bring them back to Earth in late March aboard a spaceship built by SpaceX, a rival company of Boeing. —*PTI*

Rupee rises 3 paise to close at 86.59 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 31 JAN

The rupee pared initial losses and settled for the day higher by 3 paise at 86.59 (provisional) against the US dollar, as the support from positive domestic equities was negated by unabated foreign fund outflows and month-end dollar demand. Forex traders said the rupee continued to face pressure due to sustained foreign fund outflows and the broad strength of the American currency in the overseas markets due to unabated dollar demand from oil importers and weak risk appetite. At the inter-bank foreign exchange, the rupee opened on a weak note at 86.63 and touched a high of 86.59 and a low of 86.65 against the American currency during the session.

The local unit moved in a narrow range and settled at 86.59 (provisional), higher by 3 paise over its previous close. *—PTI*

India's AceCloud to offer DeepSeek GenAI models

NEW DELHI, 31 JAN

Indigenous cloud service provider AceCloud will offer Chinese artificial intelligence platform DeepSeek-based technology models to businesses with claims that the data residency will remain in India, the company said on Friday. AceCloud offerings include over six DeepSeek models. With this, AceCloud has become the first Indian sovereign cloud provider to offer DeepSeek GenAI models. Chinese company DeepSeek made headlines after its AI model R1 overtook ChatGPT as the top-ranked free app on Apple's App Store, challenging the AI dominance concentrated so far with the US firms, particularly Silicon Valley frontrunner Open AI. AI chipmaker and Wall Street superstar Nvidia shed USD 590 billion in market capitalisation on Monday, suffering the single greatest one-day loss. *—PTI*

Govt exploring coking coal imports route from Mongolia

NEW DELHI, 31 JAN

The Indian government is currently exploring potential routes for importing coking coal from Mongolia, a crucial raw material for steel production via the blast furnace method. An anonymous official revealed that discussions are ongoing to source coking coal from the landlocked nation. This strategic move aims to diversify India's supply sources, enhancing the availability of this essential steel-making material while optimising production costs. India currently relies heavily on a limited number of countries, predominantly Australia, for 80-90 per cent of its coking coal needs. The long shipping times from these far-flung locations, which can take months, inflate logistical expenses, further impacting steel manufacturing costs. This initiative could provide a more efficient and cost-effective supply chain for Indian steelmakers. *—PTI*

'Slow progress in electronics design & manufacturing'

NEW DELHI, 31 JAN

India's indigenous electronics production has surged dramatically over the past decade, reaching an impressive Rs 9.52 lakh crore in 2023-24, as highlighted in the latest Economic Survey presented in Parliament. While the growth is commendable, the survey notes that the industry has primarily concentrated on assembly rather than advancing in design and component manufacturing. India's electronics market now accounts for 4 per cent of the global market. The production of electronic goods has escalated from Rs 1.90 lakh crore in FY15 to Rs 9.52 lakh crore in FY24, showcasing a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 17.5 per cent. Notably, the mobile manufacturing sector has achieved a significant milestone, with 99 per cent of the country's smartphone requirements now being fulfilled domestically. In FY24, India produced 330 million mobile phones. *—PTI*

Mkts rally after Eco Survey release; L&T major driver

Sensex jumps 790.11 points; Nifty climbs 281.2 points

MUMBAI, 31 JAN

Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty maintained their positive trend on Friday after the release of Economic Survey 2024-25 and buying in Larsen & Toubro post its earnings announcement.

The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex jumped 790.11 points to 77,549.92. The NSE Nifty climbed 281.2 points to 23,530.70.

India is expected to record GDP growth of 6.3-6.8 per cent in financial year 2025-26 on the back of strong fundamentals, calibrated fiscal consolidation and stable private consumption, said the Economic Survey tabled in Parliament on Friday.

From the 30-share blue-chip pack, Nestle surged over 4 per cent after the FMCG major reported 4.94 per cent increase in net profit at Rs 688.01 crore for the quarter ended December 31, 2024.

Larsen & Toubro climbed nearly 4 per cent after the infrastructure and engineering major reported 14 per cent rise in consolidated profit after tax to Rs 3,359 crore for the December quarter on the back of higher revenue from operations.

Titan, IndusInd Bank, Maruti and ITC were the other major gainers.

ITC Hotels, Bajaj Finserv, Bharti Airtel and ICICI Bank were among the laggards.

Historical data and research suggest that the Indian equity market has been notably sensitive to movements in the US market, the survey said.

In Asian markets, Tokyo settled in positive territory, while Seoul ended lower. Markets in Shanghai and Hong Kong were closed due to holidays.

US markets ended in the positive zone on Thursday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 4,582.95 crore on Thursday, according to exchange data.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.13 per cent to USD 76.97 a barrel.

The 30-share BSE benchmark advanced 226.85 points or 0.30 per cent to settle at 76,759.81 on Thursday. The Nifty went up by 86.40 points or 0.37 per cent to 23,249.50. *—PTI*

ITC Hotels, Bajaj Finserv, Bharti Airtel and ICICI Bank were among the laggards **PHOTO: X**

- From the 30-share blue-chip pack, Nestle surged over 4 per cent after the FMCG major reported 4.94 per cent increase in net profit at Rs 688.01 crore for the quarter ended 31 December

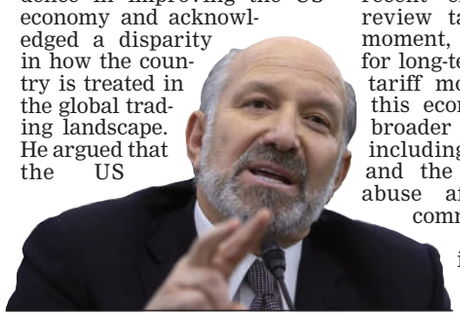
SPARKS DEBATE

India & China top tariffs, face no inflation: US Secy

WASHINGTON, 31 JAN

During his confirmation hearing before the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee, Howard William Lutnick, a businessman nominated by President Donald Trump as the new commerce secretary, sparked debate by claiming that tariffs do not cause inflation. He noted that India and China, countries with the highest tariffs, also report no inflation, labelling the correlation as "nonsense."

Lutnick expressed confidence in improving the US economy and acknowledged a disparity in how the country is treated in the global trading landscape. He argued that the US faces high tariffs, non-tariff trade barriers, and subsidies from other nations, asserting, "We need to be treated better. We need to be treated with respect." Highlighting the plight of American farmers, Lutnick declared that tariffs could instigate fairness and reciprocity, allowing these producers to thrive. "These countries take advantage of American kindness," he said, underscoring a long-standing sense of disrespect experienced by US workers.



Furthermore, Lutnick pointed to President Trump's recent executive order to review tariffs as a pivotal moment, stressing the need for long-term studies into the tariff model. He connected this economic discourse to broader national concerns, including illegal migration and the crisis of fentanyl abuse affecting American communities.

"The big tariff view is going to be studied," he concluded. *—PTI*

'REVIST & AMEND'

Eco Survey urges AI rules to align with societal values

NEW DELHI, 31 JAN

Economic Survey on Friday said regulatory frameworks will need to be "revisited and amended" to ensure that use of AI aligns with societal values, balancing innovation with accountability and transparency.

The pre-Budget document cited an IMF paper to say that governments may be forced to tax incremental profit of corporates that use AI to replace labour.

With an entire chapter dedicated to 'Labour in the AI era', the Economic Survey noted that while impact of AI on labour will be felt across the world, the problem is magnified for India, given its size and its relatively low per capita income.

The state, in turn, has to resort to taxation of profits generated from the replacement of labour with technology to mobilise those resources, as the IMF suggested in its paper, it noted.

Structural changes to how children are educated will be required in addition to safety nets that can shield existing workers from economic and social fallouts, said the pre-Budget document that details the state of the economy over the current fiscal year.

Learning from the lessons of the past, capacity building and institution building is the need of the hour for India to capitalise on the opportunity.

India's demographic advantage and diverse economic landscape position it uniquely to benefit from AI. *—PTI*

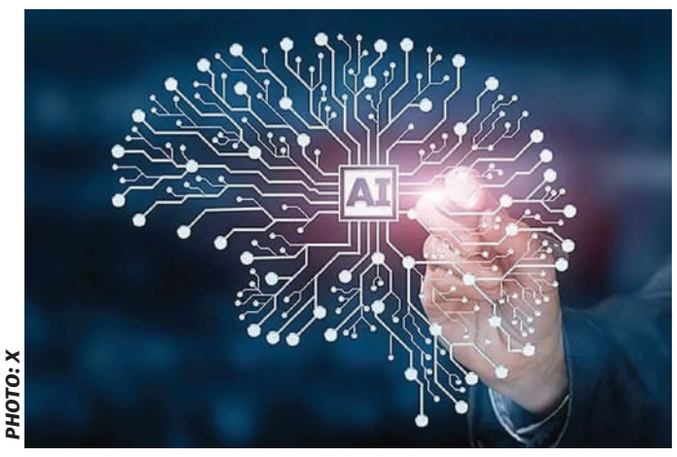


PHOTO: X

OpenAI eyes $40B funding, valuation may hit $340B

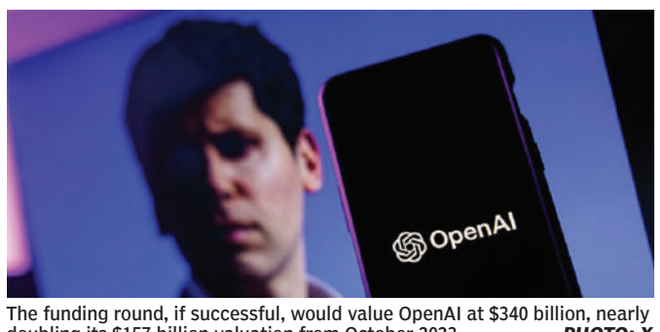
CALIFORNIA, 31 JAN

OpenAI, the company behind ChatGPT, is reportedly in discussions to raise up to $40 billion in a new funding round, according to a report from The Wall Street Journal (WSJ). The funding round, if successful, would value OpenAI at $340 billion, nearly doubling its $157 billion valuation from October 2023.

SoftBank is expected to lead the investment, contributing between $15 billion and $25 billion, the report states. The fresh capital would help OpenAI sustain its cash-intensive operations and support its Stargate project, an ambitious initiative to build AI data centers across the US.

Despite its prominence in the AI industry, OpenAI has been operating at a loss. In 2024, the company reportedly lost around $5 billion against revenues of $3.7 billion. However, with backing from SoftBank and other investors, OpenAI is set to pour billions into Stargate, aiming to expand its AI infrastructure significantly.

If the deal goes through, it would mark one of the largest funding rounds in tech history, further solidifying OpenAI's position as a leading force in artificial intelligence. *—Agencies*



The funding round, if successful, would value OpenAI at $340 billion, nearly doubling its $157 billion valuation from October 2023 **PHOTO: X**

OLA ELECTRIC LAUNCHES EIGHT S1 GEN 3 SCOOTERS

NEW DELHI, 31 JAN

Ola Electric has launched eight new scooter models under its S1 brand, based on the innovative Gen 3 platform, with prices ranging from Rs 79,999 to Rs 1,69,999. The company will continue selling its Gen 2 scooters while introducing the latest offerings.

The Gen 2 scooters will receive discounts of up to Rs 35,000, making the S1 Pro and S1 X models competitively priced at Rs 1,14,999 and Rs 69,999, respectively. Bhavish Aggarwal, Chairman and MD of Ola Electric, stated that the Gen 3 platform significantly enhances performance, efficiency, and safety.

The highlight of the Gen 3 range is the flagship S1 Pro+, featuring a 5.3kWh battery priced at Rs 1,69,999. Key innovations include a mid-drive motor, dual ABS, and patented brake-by-wire technology, which optimises braking performance and energy efficiency.

Ola Electric's shares rose by 9.78 per cent to Rs 73.39 during afternoon trading on the BSE. *—PTI*

Tata Tech faces ransomware attack, restores IT services

Pune, 31 JAN

Tata Technologies, a leading engineering services firm, disclosed on Friday that it had experienced a ransomware incident impacting some of its IT assets. As a precautionary measure, certain services were temporarily suspended but have since been fully restored, the company confirmed. In an official statement, Tata Technologies reassured that its client delivery services remained unaffected throughout the incident. "Some IT services were suspended temporarily and have now been restored," the company said. The firm has launched a detailed investigation in collaboration with cybersecurity experts to determine the root cause of the breach and implement necessary remedial measures. "We remain committed to the highest standards of security and data protection and are taking all necessary steps to mitigate any potential risks," the statement added.

The incident comes amid a sharp rise in ransomware attacks in India. A recent report by CyberPeace noted a 55 per cent increase in such attacks in 2024, with the industrial sector being most targeted—accounting for 75 per cent of breaches. *—Agencies*

Fiscal deficit touches 56.7% of full year target

NEW DELHI, 31 JAN

The Centre's fiscal deficit touched 56.7 per cent of the annual target at the end of December 2024, according to the data released by Controller General of Accounts (CGA).

In actual terms, the fiscal deficit -- the gap between expenditure and revenue -- was Rs 9,14,089 crore during the April-December 2024-25.

The deficit was 55 per cent of Budget Estimates (BE) of 2023-24 in the year-ago period.

The CGA data showed that the central government's tax revenue (net) was Rs 18.43 lakh crore, or 71.3 per cent of the BE of 2024-25. It was at 74.2 per cent during the corresponding year of the last financial year. In absolute terms, the government aims to contain the fiscal deficit at Rs 16,13,312 crore. *—PTI*

India needs 100 MT steel capacity by 2030: Steel Secy

NEW DELHI, 31 JAN

Sandeep Poundrik, India's Steel Secretary, has emphasised the urgent need to add 100 million tonnes (MT) of steel-making capacity by 2030 to reduce reliance on imports. Speaking at an event organised by the Indian Chamber of Commerce in New Delhi, Poundrik highlighted the impact of sluggish global steel demand and excessive capacities on the domestic industry.

Currently, India has an estimated 200 MT steel capacity, having added approximately 20 MT this financial year. Poundrik stressed the need for significant expansion, stating, "We have to add another 100 MT of capacity in the next six years. If we don't do that, we will become dependent on imports."

The government aims to increase India's overall steel manufacturing capacity to 300 MT by 2030 under the National Steel Policy (NSP) 2017.

In addition to capacity expansion, Poundrik emphasised the importance of keeping domestic steel prices competitive to safeguard the industry and ensure sufficient margins for investment. He also urged a transition to greener manufacturing processes to align with global moves towards reduced carbon emissions, asserting that this is vital for India's leadership in the steel sector. *—PTI*

India has an estimated 200 MT steel capacity, having added approximately 20 MT this financial year **PHOTO: PTI**

RS 84,900 PER 10 GMS

Gold jumps Rs 1,100 to all-time high

NEW DELHI, 31 JAN

Gold prices hit a fresh record high of Rs 84,900 per 10 grams in the national capital on Friday, driven by robust domestic demand and strong global cues, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity continued its ascent for the third straight session, jumping by Rs 1,100 to hit a new peak of Rs 84,900 per 10 grams.

The yellow metal has rallied by Rs 5,510 or 7 per cent since 1 January when the metal traded at Rs 79,390 per 10 grams in the local market.

Gold of 99.5 per cent purity surged by Rs 1,100 to hit a lifetime high of Rs 84,500 per 10 grams from the previous market close of Rs 83,400 per 10 grams.

Silver advanced by Rs 850 to Rs 95,000 per kg on Friday. The white metal had ended at Rs 94,150 per kg on Thursday.

In futures trade, gold contracts for February delivery appreciated by Rs 487 or 0.6 per cent to hit another record high of Rs 82,210 per 10 grams on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX).

Also, silver contracts for March delivery advanced Rs 403 or 0.43 per cent to Rs 93,849 per kg. During the day, the white metal climbed by Rs 629 or 0.67 per cent to hit an intraday high of Rs 94,075 per kg on Friday.

Investors also awaiting the Union Budget for 2025-26 to be presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. *—PTI*

The yellow metal has rallied by Rs 5,510 or 7 per cent since 1 January when the metal traded at Rs 79,390 per 10 grams **PHOTO: PTI**

Apple Intelligence set to be launched in India

CALIFORNIA, 31 JAN

Apple has confirmed that its artificial intelligence (AI) suite, "Apple Intelligence," will be available in India with localised language support starting in April. The rollout is expected to be part of the iOS 18.4 update for iPhones.

During the company's Q1 earnings call, Apple CEO Tim Cook announced plans to expand Apple Intelligence to more languages, including localised English for India and Singapore.

"We're working hard to take Apple Intelligence even further. In April, we're bringing Apple Intelligence to more languages, including French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, Japanese, Korean, and Simplified Chinese, as well as localised English to Singapore and India," Cook said.

Apple Intelligence was first introduced in October 2023 with the iOS 18.1 update, initially available only in US English. It was later expanded to regions such as the UK, Australia, and Canada.

Cook also highlighted strong iPhone sales in India, stating that the iPhone was the top-selling model in the country for the quarter. To support this momentum, Apple is expanding its retail presence by opening four new stores in Bengaluru, Pune, Delhi-NCR, and Mumbai. The expansion of Apple Intelligence and Apple's increasing focus signal the company's commitment to leveraging AI and deepening its presence. *—ANI*

PCB chief assures readiness of venues for CT

LAHORE, 31 JAN

PCB chairman Mohsin Naqvi on Friday sought to allay concerns about the country's preparedness for the upcoming Champions Trophy, stating that the three venues in Lahore, Karachi, and Rawalpindi are ready to host the ODI showpiece on the scheduled dates.The Champions Trophy is set to begin on February 19, and there have been concerns about whether Pakistan will be ready in time for the marquee event, which features the world's top eight teams and will be held for the first time since 2017.While the tournament venues in Karachi and Rawalpindi are still partially under construction or undergoing renovation, the images emerging from those locations have not painted an entirely positive picture.However, a confident Naqvi assured that Pakistan and its venues are prepared to host the ICC event fittingly. *—PTI*

Indian challenge ends at Thailand Masters badminton

BANGKOK, 31 JAN

Former world no.1 shuttler Kidambi Srikanth and Sankar Muthusamy Subramanian crashed out of the Thailand Masters Super 300 tournament as the Indian challenge ended here on Friday. While Srikanth lost 17-21 16-21 against sixth seed Zheng Xing Wang of China, a former world junior no.1 Subramanian gave a tough fight to another Chinese Xuan Chen Zhu before losing 21-19 18-21 13-21 in a match that lasted one hour and 10 minutes. Later in the day, the eight-seeded Indian men's doubles pair of Pruthvi Krishnamurthy Roy and K Sai Pratheek lost 19-21 18-21 to second seeds Muhammad Shohibul Fikri and Daniel Martin of Indonesia. Young Ramraj also couldn't cross the quarterfinal hurdle—*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Mitchell Marsh is out of Champions Trophy

SYDNEY, 31 JAN

Australia all-rounder Mitchell Marsh has been ruled of next month's Champions Trophy and is also in doubt for the Indian Premier League after that owing to lower back pain that has "not responded sufficiently to rehabilitation". Cricket Australia informed about Marsh's injury in a statement ruling him out of the Champions Trophy, which will be held in Pakistan and Dubai from February 19 to March 9. A few other reports suggest Marsh is also doubtful for the IPL. "Mitchell Marsh has been ruled out of the upcoming ICC men's Champion's Trophy with ongoing lower back pain and dysfunction," CA said in a release.—*PTI*

BAI-REC to host first-ever BWF Level 1 course

NEW DELHI, 31 JAN

In a bid to build a strong network of qualified coaches, the Badminton Association of India (BAI) will conduct the first-ever BWF Level 1 Course for coaches along with BAI Level 1 (Advanced) courses at multiple venues in February and March. The BWF Level 1 courses, which are supported by REC Limited and the Sports Authority of India (SAI), will be held in Goa, Raipur, and Guwahati. Each state association will be allowed to nominate preferably one male and a female representative between the age of 25-45, who fulfil the basic criteria of having represented the state in National or Zonal championships and have coaching experience of three years with the association. *—PTI*

13 years for 15 balls: Kohli scene turns sour

Haryana, Kerala seal quarterfinal berths from Group C

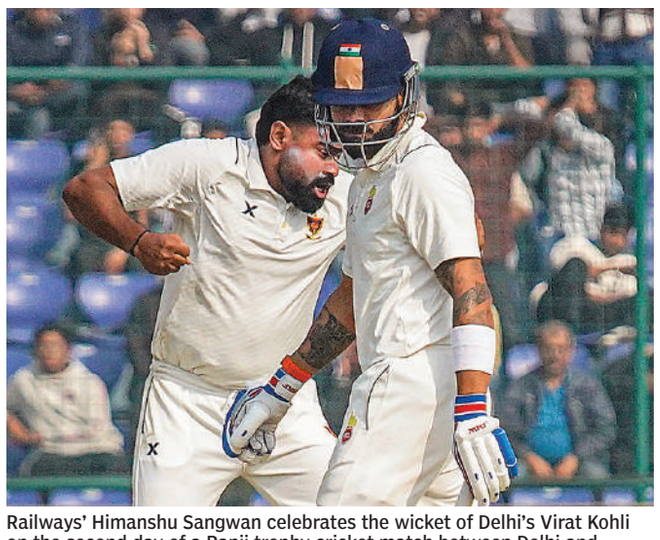
NEW DELHI, 31 JAN

Virat Kohli's first Ranji Trophy innings in 13 years lasted all of 15 balls, extending his lean run and fuelling the raging debate over his form. For the 5000-odd crowd that assembled to watch Kohli (6 off 15 balls), it was fun while it lasted but when he had his off-stump uprooted by Railways pacer Himanshu Sangwan in the 28th over of Delhi's first innings, a majority of them took no time to exit the Arun Jaitley Stadium.

The frequent chants of 'RCB, RCB' and 'Kohli, Kohli' dried up as the superstar took the long walk back to the dressing room, giving Railway employee Sangwan the most prized scalp of his career. Ahead of his first domestic red-ball appearance since November 2012, Kohli had trained with former India coach Sanjay Bangar to iron out flaws in his batting that crept up on the tour of Australia.

More specifically, it was the ball outside the off-stump that haunted the former India captain on the two-month-long tour Down Under.

In the next over bowled by medium pacer Kunal Yadav, Kohli tried to assert himself and played and missed twice to balls pitched on his vulnerable zone wide outside the off-stump.



Railways' Himanshu Sangwan celebrates the wicket of Delhi's Virat Kohli on the second day of a Ranji trophy cricket match between Delhi and Railways, at the Arun Jaitley Stadium, in New Delhi, **PHOTO: PTI**

After collecting two singles, Kohli decided to dominate the opposition -- right-arm pacer Sangwan in this particular over. Standing way outside the crease, Kohli disdainfully dispatched Sangwan towards the straight boundary.

It was still the first session and the ball was doing a bit but in his attempt to dominate Sangwan, the very next ball, Kohli went for an expansive drive off a good length delivery but missed it completely to see his off-stump shattered.

The ball seamed back in contributing to Kohli's downfall.

He had a quick look at the surface before trudging back to the pavilion and with him his sea of fans headed towards the exit door. About 500 of them clung precariously to the iron grill next to the dressing room balcony where Kohli sat after his dismissal, a scene that once again highlighted the superstar's popularity.

The ones who exited re expected return for Kohli's second essay which could be on day three. Sangwan's wild celebration was on the expected lines. He had just taken the wicket of his life.

Kerala trounce Bihar to enter QF

At Thumba, Kerala walloped Bihar by an innings and 169 runs inside two days to go on top of Group C with 28 points. Kerala had begun the match on 21 points and they gained seven points, including one bonus point for an innings victory. After amassing 351, Kerala bundled out Bihar for 64 in their first innings and for 118 in their second dig to celebrate a massive win.

Spinner Jalaj Saxena was their lead cast with a match haul of 10 for 53.

Brief scores: At Bengaluru: Karnataka: 304 all out in 101 overs (Mayank Agarwal 91, Devdutt Padikkal 43, KL Shrijith 37; Anshul Kamboj 4/32, Anuj Thakral 4/88) vs Haryana: 232/5 in 66 overs (Ankit Kumar 118, Nishant Singh (batting) 35; Yashovardhan Parantap 2/42). At Thumba: Kerala: 351 all out beat Bihar: 64 all out in 23.1 overs (Jalaj Saxena 5/19) and 118 all out in 41.1 overs (S Gani 31, Veer Pratap Singh 30; Jalaj Saxena 5/34, Adiya Sarvate 3/27) by an innings and 169 runs. *—PTI*

HEARTBREAK FOR K'TAKA

BENGALURU, 31 JAN

Karnataka's tiny hopes of entering the Ranji Trophy knockouts from Elite Group C was dissipated along with Haryana skipper Ankit Kumar's smooth hundred here on Friday.

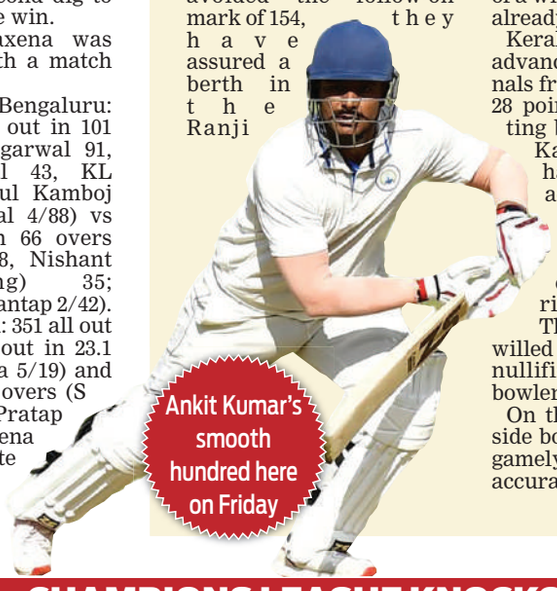
Earlier, Karnataka, starting from overnight 267 for five, lost five wickets quickly and were bowled out for 304 in their first innings on a rather placid pitch.

In fact, once Haryana avoided the follow-on mark of 154, they have assured a berth in the Ranji Trophy quarterfinals for the first time since the 2016-17 season, when they had lost to Jharkhand. This is the first time Karnataka are missing a place in the knockouts since the 2015-16 season. Karnataka still can force a favourable.result against Haryana here, but stand no chance to gain a bonus point which was crucial to their progress to the quarterfinals. The eight-time champions will end up with 25 points in the event of a win here, but Haryana already have 26 points.

Kerala, the other team to advance to the quarterfinals from this group, have 28 points. Even after getting bundled out for 304, Karnataka might have hoped for a miracle but their bowlers, who had kept them afloat with some lion-hearted efforts, could not rise to the occasion.

They found a strong-willed rival in Ankit who nullified the Karnataka bowlers rather easily.

On their part, the home side bowlers, though tried gamely, were not at their accurate best. *—PTI*



NATIONAL GAMES

Gold medallist Manipur's Bindyarani Devi, centre, silver medallist West Bengal's Shrabani Das, right, and bronze medallist Manipur's L. Nilam Devi pose for photos during the presentation ceremony of the women's weightlifting event at the 38th National Games, in Dehradun **PHOTO: PTI**

Bindyarani Devi wins gold, Manipur lifters bag 2 medals

DEHRADUN, 31 JAN

Manipur's star weightlifter S Bindyarani Devi set a national record in snatch en route to her gold medal-winning effort in the women's 55kg category at the ongoing National Games here on Friday.

Bindyarani, a Commonwealth Games silver medallist, overcame an initial setback in her first attempt at 83kg in the snatch category. She displayed remarkable resilience, lifting 88kg in her final attempt to break the national record.

She broke the record of 86kg held by Mirabai Chanu.

But Mirabai's pet event is 49kg. She competed in 55kg only for a brief period.

Bindyarani's dominance continued in clean and jerk as well, where she successfully lifted 107kg in her first attempt. Though she faltered at 112kg in her second attempt, she bounced back with a 113kg lift in her last effort. Her total lift of 201kg was just one kilogram short of her national record of 202kg. With this victory, Bindyarani now holds all three national records -- snatch, clean and jerk, and total lift in women's 55kg category.

"I was well prepared, and I am happy with my performance. It is always nice to get a record in your name. It's good that now both snatch and clean & jerk records are in my name," Bindyarani said.

Haryana men, and Odisha women complete hat-trick of Rugby 7s gold medals

Haryana men crushed Maharashtra, while Odisha women defeated Bihar in Rugby Sevens to complete a hat-trick of gold medals at the National Games here on Friday.

Haryana defeated Maharashtra 22-7 in the men's summit clash, while Odisha thrashed Bihar 29-5 in the women's final to cover themselves in glory. Maharashtra men tried gamely to challenge Haryana, the most dominant team on the national circuit, leveling the scores at 7-7. But Haryana stepped up the pressure to beat Maharashtra for the third successive time in the National Games final. *—PTI*

TEENAGER PARTH MANE WINS 10M AIR RIFLE GOLD

DEHRADUN, 31 JAN

World junior champion Parth Mane held his nerves to beat teammate Rudranksh Patil en route to the men's 10m air rifle gold as Maharashtra registered a 1-2 finish at the 38th National Games here on Friday.

Services' Kiran Jadhav won the bronze.

The 17-year-old Mane produced a commanding performance to hold the lead after every series barring one.

Remaining unruffled throughout the final despite the presence of more experienced shooters around him, Mane fired consistently and was able to overcome the blip of logging 9.9 and 10.0 with his 12th and 14th shots.

Six of his next 10 shots earned him 10.7 points or more.

Rudranksh breathed down his neck after 20 shots, only 0.6 points behind, but Mane overcame the sustained pressure from his senior.

Rudranksh scored 42.2 points with his last four shots but Mane responded with 42.4 points, including rounds of 10.8 and 10.7.

Mane scored a total of 252.6 points, 0.4 points better than the score that fetched the Paris 2024 Olympics gold medal in this category. *—PTI*

Gold medallist Parth Rakesh Mane, center, silver medallist Rudrankksh Patil, left, and bronze medallist Ankush Kiran Jadhav **PHOTO: PTI**

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE KNOCKOUT

Real Madrid to play Manchester City in standout clash

NYON, 31 JAN

Real Madrid will play Manchester City in the Champions League knockout playoffs round in a standout clash of the past two title winners after the draw was made Friday.

Man City, the 2023 champion, will host the first leg on Feb. 11 or 12 and the return game in Madrid is on Feb. 18 or 19. Madrid won a record-extending 15th European title last season.The winner over two legs advances to the round of 16 to face either Atletico Madrid or Bayer Leverkusen, who placed in the top eight of the new 36-team league standings that ended Wednesday. Teams that finished from Nos. 9 to 24 in the standings dropped into the two-leg knockout playoffs. Madrid placed 11th and Man City barely qualified in 22nd, after rallying to beat Club Brugge 3-1 in a must-win game.

Clash of the past two title winners **PHOTO: X/ @REALMADRID**

By finishing in 22nd Man City knew it would have to face No. 11 Madrid or No. 12 Bayern Munich in the playoffs. Munich was drawn instead to face 21st-place Celtic. Seedings decided by the 36-team standings means Madrid and Man City already know the winner of their two-leg blockbuster will be drawn then to face No. 5 Atletico or No. 6 Leverkusen.

UEFA makes the round of 16 pairings on Feb. 21.The tennis-style knockout bracket in the fresh competition format also now allows teams from the same country to face each other before the quarterfinals. *—PTI*

Pandya and Dube smash 50s as India scores 181 for 9

PUNE, 31 JAN

Hardik Pandya's breathtaking blows and comeback man Shivam Dube's belligerence took India to a par-score of 181 for 9 after the top-order failed to negotiate the short of-length deliveries bowled by England pacers in the fourth T20 International here on Friday.

Coming in at No. 7, Pandya was stylish and destructive in equal measure hitting four boundaries and an equal number of maximums in his 30-ball-53.

Dube (53 off 34 balls) also didn't do too badly in a stand of 87 off 48 balls for the sixth wicket after pacer Saqib Mahmood (3/35 in 4 overs) reduced India to 12 for 3 by the end of the second over.

Dube was coming back into national colors after bagging a pair in a Ranji Trophy match against Jammu and Kashmir last week.

But Pandya, who many feel can take MS Dhoni's role as a finisher, began with an aggressive approach, then rotated the strike for a few overs before launching a brutal final assault on the English bowlers. However, his innings were cut short by one shot too many.

He got an able ally in Dube, who hit seven fours and two sixes as India got as many as 109 runs in the backend. *—PTI*

Australia strike twice before rain saves Sri Lanka

GALLE, 31 JAN

Australia's menacing attack was left frustrated after the final two sessions of day three were washed out as Sri Lanka had a respite from a Galle surface starting to play tricks.

The day started amid sunny conditions and 27 overs were bowled before rain cascaded on the ground out of nowhere just before lunch. There was no further play for the remainder of the day, with stumps called more than two hours ahead of schedule. In response to Australia's massive first-innings of 654 for 6 declared, Sri Lanka were 136 for 5 at stumps with Dinesh Chandimal playing a lone hand so far with an attractive 63 not out. Kusal Mendis is unbeaten on 10.

Sri Lanka 136 for 5 (Chandimal 63*, de Silva 22, Starc 2-13, Kuhnemann 2-48) trail Australia 654 for 6 dec by 518 runs. *—PTI*

HONOURING A LEGEND

Sachin to get BCCI Lifetime Achievement Award

MUMBAI, 31 JAN

Tendulkar, known for his iconic career and record-breaking runs in Test and ODI formats, continues to be a symbol of excellence in international cricket.

The legendary Sachin Tendulkar, renowned for his iconic batting records and profound impact on international cricket, will be honored with the BCCI's Lifetime Achievement Award at the Board's annual gala on Saturday.

At 51 years old, Tendulkar has played 664 international matches for India and holds the record for the most Test and ODI runs in cricket history.

Tendulkar will be conferred with the BCCI's Lifetime Achievement Award at the Board's annual gala on Saturday **PHOTO: PTI**

"Yes, he will be the recipient of the C K Nayudu Lifetime Achievement Award for the year 2024," a Board source confirmed to PTI. His 200 Test appearances and 463 ODIs remain unmatched in the history of the game. Over his illustrious career, he accumulated 15,921 runs in Tests and a staggering 18,426 in ODIs.

Though he played only one T20 International, Tendulkar's career is defined by his remarkable achievements across formats.

In 2023, the award was presented to former India head coach Ravi Shastri and wicketkeeping great Farokh Engineer.

Regarded as the greatest batter of his era, Tendulkar was not just known for his run-scoring feats but also for being a symbol of cricketing excellence. *—PTI*

Ruud draws Norway level in Davis Cup Qualifiers

OSLO, 31 JAN

Davis Cup qualifiers first round tie between Norway and Argentina ended 1-1 after the opening day as Casper Ruud defeated Argentine Mariano Navone 6-3, 6-3, leveling the tie 1-1 after Tomas Martin Etcheverry gave Argentina an early lead with a win over Nicolai Budkov Kjaer.

Ruud displayed clinical form on his way to securing his 28th Davis Cup match win. He won 71 percent (35/49) of first-serve points and saved six of seven break points he faced in the 70-minute encounter.

Earlier, Etcheverry escaped Norway's 18-year-old Budkov Kjaer 7-5, 2-6, 7-6(5) after a three-hour, 49-minute battle. Etcheverry trailed 2-4 in the final set but refused to go down.

Budkov Kjaer, the 2024 Wimbledon boys' singles champion, suffered with cramps as the match progressed. Etcheverry seized control in lengthy baseline exchanges and eventually secured his fourth Davis Cup match win. *—PTI*